

TWO TURNS OF THE WHEEL



The pipe burst, and out poured the water.

To face Page 10.

TWO TURNS OF THE WHEEL.

BY

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'NIHILISM ; OR, THE TERROR UNMASKED,'
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TWO TURNS OF THE WHEEL.

CHAPTER I.

THE GOLDEN BOOT.



AS I knocked the ashes out of my second after-supper pipe, my wife remarked that I had been silent for nearly half-an-hour, and that it was rather hard for a woman at her age to sit with a companion who was duller than a

dumb-waiter.

‘Matilda, I have been thinking over our history, and since it is to be written, I shall begin at the beginning.’

‘A tree, if there is human nature in it,’ said Mrs. Gummer, ‘may like to put itself forward, but it would be stupid to show its roots, which are not beautiful,

though they lead to roses. Do you think the History of England is any the better for starting with ancient Britons, going about with no other clothing than blue paint? But if you will tell what you were before you were anything, it's no use wasting my breath, which is short. All the Lords and Commons on the face of the earth might talk till their tongues were thin as curling-paper, but they would not make a crab to walk like a soldier.'

'My dear Matilda, not being an author, I can't set off in the middle of a story and work backwards and forwards. And if I skipped the beginning, no one could make head or tail of the middle and the end.'

Moreover, there is no reason why I should wish to do so. Born, bred, and living over forty years at Bow, I should be a rank impostor if I set up for an aristocrat by birth or rearing, but still I am not ashamed of my family. If I could be unborn, and have my choice, I would not change my parents, not if dukes and duchesses offered to father and mother me; but I am not such a false-tongued booby as to say I am glad that my actual father was not a duke and my identical mother a duchess, and that I was not fed with a silver-gilt spoon out of a real china saucer. Because, as Mrs. Gummer says, the gooseberries I was born to, and could get at, and which agreed with me, are sweet, I do not call the aristocratic grapes sour because they were above my reach.

Besides, I was not, as Mrs. Gummer has often remarked, a human hole-in-the-wall nestless sparrow,

forced to grub for worms before being fledged. My father, who kept the Golden Boot at Bow, had better use for his pockets than for keeping his hands warm in winter. I was an only child, and I remember the shop-boy saying to the apprentice: 'The young Boot has got his polish put on pretty thick for him. He will come into a tidy cartload of pence when the old Boot cuts up.' I asked my mother what it meant, and she replied that what was my parents' would be mine some day.

My father was so fond of talking of his success that people thought he was as rich as the man I read of at school, who killed himself by drinking boiling hot gold. A little seems much to those who start with nothing. Soleing, heeling, and cobbling in general, was my father's first bread and cheese; and by hook, crook, toil, and pinching, he rose to a well-stocked boot and shoe shop, plenty of money in the bank, and several freehold houses.

At night, after the shop was closed, and the takings counted and locked up in the cash-box, my father liked to chat about what he was worth and how he came by it. I remember my father's talk about himself better than I do the story of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves.

'Well, mother—he always called his wife mother when the shop was shut and his apron off)—what to do touching the laying out of that bit of money is worrying my mind like a bad-cut boot does a tender foot. Money at the bank don't, in a manner of speak-

ing, earn tags to one's boot-laces. I think I shall go in for another freehold. Bricks and mortar bought to the right tune, and the tenant looked after like a starved cat does a mouse, pays uncommon. To be sure, mother,' he would continue, after a drink of porter, 'it has been a rise since I was at the wax-end, and reckoning anything over a pound as a topping week. I stuck to my last, and a man who does so will not want, and, leave alone living, will lay up. Don't talk to me about misfortune, which is the lazy vagabond's excuse for idleness and drinking. My start was my fingers and a trade that ain't over-paid, and where am I now ?'

Here he would take another drink of porter, and light his pipe.

'And Tom,' he continued, 'you are young ; but as you are old enough to eat and get into mischief, you are pretty nigh old enough to learn. Now, just you mind what I say. Always stick to your business, Tom. Holiday-making is the worst invention I have come across, and it is the curse of the working man. For you see, Tom, it's a game of no earning and awful spending. Did you ever hear tell of a tree leaving off growing to make holiday ? and for a man to be idler than a tree, Tom, is what I call being a lazy vagabond, and starvation is too good for him.'

At dinner, father, who always dined in his apron, except on Sundays, when he covered his best waistcoat with his Sunday silk handkerchief, talked about business. Leather was dear ; closed uppers had gone

up ; wages were ruinous ; and competition that was driving the country to barefoot ruin had pared down profits to a mouldy crust, and not much of it. Rates and taxes swallowed up the best part of the income. Why do not people pay their bills as soon as they are due ? When a customer became insolvent, and wiped off scores by going through the Court, dinner at the Golden Boot was a misery. Father and mother went on together against the Government for letting thieves out of prison before they paid honest tradesmen who were looked to for the rates and taxes of the country. After saying dreadful things about the customer and the Government, they generally had a quarrel. My mother upbraided my father for allowing a scamp to get a footing in his books, and my father retorted that, if he had a business woman for a wife, insolvent rogues would go shoeless sooner than wear out his soles. Having fired that shot, he retreated to the shop before my mother could reply. But the Golden Boot was not often scheduled.

I may have been a pledge of affection, but certainly I was not a bond of peace. Some of my earliest recollections are bickerings about me. I was wayward, and as my mother would not have me, her only child, contradicted, I became a nuisance to everybody, my mother and myself included. If my father spoke roughly to me my mother said she was not going to have her boy's spirit trodden on by any man's hobnail clumps. I remember a dreadful uproar when I was about five years old. My father had forbidden me to play in the

shop, for fear I should break the glass show-cases. I had coaxed my mother to buy me a large cricket-ball, and I am sure she would have bought me a lawyer's wig or a bishop's mitre if I had whined for either of those adult toys. In the fitting-room was a tremendous mirror, the pride of the Golden Boot. My father was on one knee, compressing a lady's large foot into a small boot, when the cricket-ball was hurled against the mirror, and there was a smash. My father started up, and jerked the customer and her chair against a show-case, and there was another smash. The lady screamed, my father raved and stamped, and I blubbered and bellowed. My mother rushed into the room and shrieked when she saw the shattered mirror. 'Better have lost a hundred pounds!' she exclaimed. 'We shall have no luck for seven years!' When she ascertained that I was the cause of the mischief, she called me a naughty boy, and threatened to beat me. 'I'll thrash the young scamp within an inch of his life,' said my father. My mother turned on him like a tigress, and vowed that no man who was ever shod in leather should lay his little finger on a child of hers. I was not punished, but there was no peace at the Golden Boot for a week.

My father was not unkind, and marked me pretty high; but my mother's figure was stupendous. She thought my equal had never seen the daylight, and before I was out of petticoats prophesied:

That I should set the Thames on fire; which I have not done and have no desire to do.

That I should get to the top of the tree : and so I did, after apples and bird-nests, but that was not her meaning.

That I should ride in my own carriage, and in that my mother's words came true.

There was constant worry about my health, though I was a strong boy and never ailed, except when I ate too much almond-rock. Could such a clever boy be reared ? The doctor was consulted. He hoped that with my sound constitution I should pull through, but my brain was not to be worked too early, and I was not to begin schooling until I was eight years old. If the doctor had told my mother that my being so very clever was mere moonshine he would not have taken another penny from the Golden Boot, and if he had recommended that I should be sent to school he would have lost a patient.

At six I had the measles. The Golden Boot was turned topsy-turvy. The doctor ordered me to be kept warm, and, according to my nature, I did my best to be cold. My mother, who was frightened, said that if I would stop in bed like a good boy and not untuck myself, I should have everything I liked. Thereupon I wanted all the toys I had ever seen or heard of, and my measles was several crowns in the pocket of the Noah's Ark. I had boxes of toys. I fancied magnetic fish, and to prevent me taking cold I had a basin of warm water to swim them in. When I was tired of child's toys I asked for the cash-box to play with. My father took out the valuables, put in a

shilling's-worth of coppers, and gave it to me. The next adult toy I asked for was the gigantic Golden Boot fixed at the top of the house. My father declared he would not have his sign pulled down to please anybody. My mother swore that her child (when she was angry she spoke of me as her child and as if my father was no relation) should not be laid at death's door for the sake of all the signs in London; and if no one else would do it she would get a ladder, and break her neck, or haul down the Golden Boot. The doctor came in, and the dispute was referred to him. He felt my pulse, looked at my tongue, examined my skin, and said that I was out of danger, mending fast, and that a little crying would do me no harm. From that moment I hated the doctor with all the capacity of my young heart, and the Golden Boot continued to swing and creak at the top of the house. To pacify me I had my mother's watch, and succeeded in breaking the glass. The bed-clothes had to be changed in haste, lest a piece of the glass should hurt the poor, dear boy. Our servant was kind and patient, but she could not help exclaiming: "Drat the boy, he will worry a dozen people into their graves to keep him out of his!" For this speech she was sternly reproved, and ordered to leave at the end of the month. But the warning went for nothing, for it was a habit of my mother's to wind up a rebuke to the servant with a notice to quit. That was a good many years ago, when domestic servants thought it a punishment to lose a

place. Now they think it a favour to their employer if they stop over a month.

Whooping-cough, which soon followed, was worse to me than the measles. Everybody in the house—my father, the servant, the apprentice, and the shop-boy—was ordered by my mother to thump my back as hard as possible whenever I coughed. My mother thumped me hard because she loved me. My father was heavy-handed and could not help hurting me. The servant hit me as if she was banging hard beefsteak with the rollingpin, because she wished to please her mistress. The apprentice and the shop-boy pummelled me with a vengeance, because they owed me a grudge for teasing them. I suppose that knocking the breath out of a child's body is the correct treatment for whooping-cough, but it is not pleasant physic.

Soon after I had nearly ended my existence by a gorge of jam-roll and almond-rock, on my seventh birthday, it was resolved to send me to school. I am afraid that, with the exception of my mother, the Golden Boot would have danced for joy if I had been sent to the North Pole to feed the bears. My father could not keep me out of the shop. I pulled about his stock, twisted the buttons off boots, picked the india-rubber out of the elastic sides, made whips of the laces, and stuffed paper into the toes. Immense was my delight when I saw my father or the apprentice vainly trying to fit on one of the stuffed boots, but neither my father nor the customer enjoyed the fun. My mother

had a share of the tormenting. I was always at her workbox, or the store cupboard, or breaking something in the kitchen. My last performance before going to school was this. I cut a clothes-line, fastened one end round the water-pipe, and the other to the plate-rack in the scullery. I was having a capital swing, when suddenly both supports gave way. The pipe burst, and out poured the water. The plate-rack toppled over, and the plates and dishes made a dreadful crash. Father, mother, servant, and apprentice rushed into the kitchen. My mother was sure I was killed, and bundled off the apprentice for the doctor. That exploit determined my mother to send me to school without delay. The doctor, as usual, agreed with her, and my father said that if something was not done he should soon be at the expense of burying me.

For a year I went to Miss Stop's establishment for young ladies of any age and for boys under seven. My mother said I was younger than my years, and that I had never been from home, and so Miss Stop obliged the Golden Boot, which could often recommend her school. I learnt to read a little, to make crooked pothooks and shaky hangers, to eat jumbles, and to chew india-rubber. I defied Miss Stop, for I had been present when my mother said that she would not allow me to be scolded, or kept in, and that she would be the death of anyone who dared to raise a finger against her child.

Miss Stop could not have been sorry when I was transferred as a weekly boarder to Homer House

Classical and Commercial Academy, at Homerton. There the boys called me Tom Dunce, and taunted me out of my idleness. I took to work, and in three years I had crept up from the bottom of the lowest class to nearly the top of the first class. Unless a boy was well-nigh an idiot he could easily be the first at Homer House. But I was mightily pleased with the progress, and I agreed with my mother that I was an uncommon genius.

At twelve I went to a finishing boarding-school, with a large box of clothes, a huge plum-cake, a bottle of home-made wine, a ten-bladed knife, and half-a-sovereign for pocket-money. The school selected for the completion of my education was Tudor Mansion, Epping. According to the prospectus, on which was engraved an imposing sketch of a palatial mansion and a magnificently-timbered park, everything ever known or thought of was taught. Classics, dancing, mathematics, gymnastics, the modern languages by natives, music, bookkeeping, fencing, mensuration, all the ologies, and the use of the globes, are a few of the subjects mentioned in the thickly cream-laid prospectus. Besides this education there was liberal board, the comforts of a home, and high moral training for thirty guineas a year, a silver fork and spoon, and six towels. No extras, except pew-rent and the doctor.

That prospectus was a delusion, and a snare, and a cheat. The mansion was a dilapidated old house, and the park was a dreary half-acre playground, ornamented with two dwarf trees and a stump. The assistants

knew less than the principal, Mr. Bompas, Ph.D., M.A., and ever so many letters after his name, and he had an uncommon small stock of knowledge. As my father said of pretenders, his learning was only an eye-bait, a shopwindow dummy with nothing to back it. Now and then a French native was caught, but he never stayed beyond the quarter, and he was of no use, except as a butt for the boys. What a fibber Bompas was! In the letters to parents, at Midsummer and Christmas, he made us say that we were getting on well with our French, and had become fluent in that useful tongue. Why, the whole school, Bompas and Mrs. Bompas included, did not know half a dozen phrases. As for Latin, after two years at *hic, hæc, hoc*, vocative wanting, and I wish all the cases had been ditto, I went into the Delectus and then into Cæsar, and then back again to the Delectus, because Mr. Bompas said he liked his boys to be thoroughly grounded. You see, Bompas could not teach more than he knew, and Cæsar, and even the Delectus, floored him without a crib. Mathematics was an imposing name for arithmetic up to tare and tret and vulgar fractions. As for the use of the globes, I never could find it out. What good is it to teach a youth that the earth turns on a brass rod, and that the people on the other side of the world walk with their heads downwards, like flies on a ceiling? It may be science, but it is not sense.

When I left school, Mr. Bompas gave me a parchment certificate of merit, and my mother believed I

was the greatest scholar of the age. I did not, for I had a grain more sense than when I left Homer House ; but it was years before I knew and understood what a thorough fraud was the thickly cream-laid prospectus of Tudor Mansion.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHOICE OF A PROFESSION.

My father's all work and no play broke him down at last. After always abusing other people for coddling themselves and taking physic, he was obliged to call in the doctor. My father was over sixty, and some years older than my mother. He was laid up when I came home from school, and said to me :

'Tom, mine is a case of uppers, soles, stitching, and everything a-cracking and a-giving way before their time, and it will be a clever doctor, Tom, that could give me any more wear by soleing and heeling and patching. And why, Tom? It's for being always on the go, and for not making a halt to do a mend when it was wanted. Carefulness is wise, but being for ever piling up coins for them to kick down as steps into your shoes, and no enjoyment for yourself, is acting stupider than a coster's donkey, which can't help having his life worn out for another's living. It's a foolish bee, Tom, that starves to death because she is too busy to taste her own honey.'

He was very much dispirited that evening.

‘Mother,’ he said, ‘you will want for nothing when I am gone, and that ought to be a comfort ; but, somehow, it does seem hard to leave what one has worked for and got honestly. If Providence let us take our savings with us it would be an encouragement for thrift. And moreover, mother, death would not be half so hard if we had to die together.’

‘Really, father, for a man just over his prime to talk in that way, is wicked. And, as to going with you, many a woman—younger than her husband—might say, come first go first is fair, which it is ; but, for all its being fair, when you go I shan’t be long after. Weeds I would not put off, and it is not many of them I should wear out.’

When my father was better and could look after business, he came back to his old way of thinking. He said he did not believe in doctors, and he was sure that work hurt no man. About six weeks after I left school, my father asked me at supper—bread, cheese, and porter—what I had done in the day ?

‘Nothing, but just walking about.’

‘Yes, you have done worse than nothing. You have been eating and drinking and wearing out clothes and shoe-leather. But you have not earned so much as a crust. Afore I was as old as you, Tom, I was at the awl and wax-end from seven in the morning till nine at night.’

‘More shame, then, for those that worked a boy like a slave,’ said my mother, tartly.

‘Well, mother, anyhow Tom has had his run, and

it's time he put on the apron. The sooner he is at it the better for him, and also for the Golden Boot. Stick to the shop, Tom, and we will make it the biggest retail concern in the three kingdoms.'

'My boy in the shop!' exclaimed my mother. 'My boy in the boot and shoe line! Not while I am alive and with a pair of hands to keep him out of it.'

'Don't fly out in that way. What else would you have, mother? It's been my pride to rise myself from cobbling to what I am, and my glory in the Golden Boot is biggerer than ever when I think of Tom growing up to be partner with me, and keeping up the Golden Boot when you and me is gone, mother.'

How my mother raved! Her boy was not going to sniff blacking all the days of his life, not to please any man. Her boy should not corn his fingers with fitting on his inferiors' boots and shoes. Her boy's talents were not going to be thrown away in a holland apron behind a counter. She would rather work her fingers to the very marrow of the bone than her boy should go into the Golden Boot, or any other shop.

The quarrel thus began went on for several days, but my father, not being strong, gave way, hoping, no doubt, that, after trying other places, I should be glad to come back to the Golden Boot.

'There, mother, we have had galore of this tread-corn and kick-bunion duel. Let Tom try what he chooses; and, if he don't like it, the Golden Boot will be open to him.'

'He won't take to the Golden Boot, for a genius

like him has a footing miles above trade, particularly the retail,' said my mother; 'and you will be proud enough of him when you see him sitting on the very top of his tree, a-setting the Thames on fire, and riding in his own carriage and creams. What will you be, Tom?'

'I will be a captain in the navy.'

'Why not start as admiral?' asked my father.

'Go to sea?' exclaimed my mother.

My father chuckled, and my mother was scared. I knew nothing about the sea, but I had been reading a seafaring story, in which the youthful hero lights on an unknown coast, fills his ship with gold and diamonds, and marries a native princess. My mother besought me not to think of going to sea, but I was deaf to her



entreaties, and made her thoroughly miserable for a fortnight. Seafaring men abound about Bow, and many of them dealt at the Golden Boot. A pilot who

was consulted by my mother, advised her to let me have a taste of sea life. 'Some lads won't be turned from salt water, but your son is a born land-lubber, and a week in a coaster will be sea enough for his lifetime.' The pilot was right. I had a fortnight of it, and I would not have gone on a voyage for Plucky Dick's shipload of gold and diamonds and beautiful princess.

My father was a guardian of the poor, a vestryman, a commissioner of paving, and churchwarden. He was not ambitious of public honours, but the Golden Boot

was supposed to be rich, and riches and honours always go together, or, as Matilda says, it is not the poor man's penny roll and saveloy, but the rich man's banquet, that is followed by desert.

'Mother, the vestry is a nuisance, and so is the poor. Being a churchwarden runs into a lot of time and no salary, but I dare say it brings customers to the shop. Parish office, mother, is bait for business; and the party who wants to hook good fish, mustn't grudge paying for fine bait.'

Now and then a bishop was caught to preach a charity sermon, and then the Golden Boot was proud as a two-tailed peacock. My father shook hands with the bishop and the bishop's chaplain, and being a thorough-going churchman provided for his lordship splendid sherry, paid for out of the Church fund. My mother took extra pains in getting up my father's shirt for the bishop's Sunday, and rubbed his hands with pumice stone, for one disagreeable of the boot and shoe trade is that the hands get stained with the leather and the varnish, and my father was never comfortable in gloves, but pulled them off directly he had succeeded in getting them on. At ordinary charity sermons my mother gave a shilling and I gave a sixpence; but when a bishop preached, my mother put half-a-crown and I a shilling in the plate. We had value for our three-and-sixpence. To see my father coming out of the vestry just before the bishop, to see him, when the blessing was over, going into the vestry after the bishop, and to see him walk beside the bishop to the

bishop's carriage, gratified my mother, and I liked it, particularly as we had a grander Sunday dinner on the occasion, with a bottle of the vestry sherry.

We were dining on a bishop's Sunday, and my mother was admiring the bishop's lawn sleeves and wig, for bishops were wigged in those days when they preached.

'It is a very imposing dress, father.'

'And, mother, look at the way they are shod. Palaces free and wages that are immense.'

'And why should not our Tom be a bishop?' said my mother. 'Bless me, how well he would look in those big shirt-sleeves and white wig!'

'Vestry sherry don't agree with your noddle,' said my father, laughing. 'Why, if Tom went into the Church he would never be more than a curate, and that is a dry crust with never a sniff of cheese, or, as the awl and waxenders say, an old boot with worn-out upper and no sole.'

'And pray why should not my boy, with his talents, rise to be a bishop?'

'Why shouldn't he be a Gog or a Magog or a Great Bell at Bow? What have talents got to do with the matter?' asked my father. 'Fat livings and bishoprics go by kissing, not by talents.'

'Of course you will oppose everything that might get my boy into life.'

'Anyhow, it's time Tom was something more than an eater and drinker and a wearer out of unearned leather,' growled my father.

‘Never you mind. You shan’t put your heel on my boy. And if Tom would like to go into the Church, he shall, and that is the long and short and middle of it.’

‘I don’t want to be a parson,’ said I.

‘Well, you have some sense, Tom,’ remarked my father, as he gave me another half-glass of the vestry wine.

‘If he is left to your mercy he will be bound behind a counter.’

‘There’s worse shoeing than that,’ said my father.

‘I won’t go into the shop,’ said I.

‘There!’ exclaimed my mother, triumphantly, ‘you won’t trap him, with all your cleverness and coy ducks.’

‘What are you about, Tom?’

‘Only looking at the newspaper.’

‘That is pretty manners after hearing a bishop. What do you think of that, mother?’

‘Put down the paper, Tom, which is not respectable on Sundays. But it’s your doing, father, for you worry and drive the boy to sitting on his catechism.’

My father drank another glass of the vestry sherry, covered his head with his handkerchief, leant back in his chair, and began to snore. He always slept on Sunday afternoons, holding it to be wicked to do anything except eat, drink, and doze after coming from church.

A bishop’s sleeves and wig being impossible, my mother thought of the medical profession, and consulted our doctor.

‘Well,’ said that gentleman, ‘if you spend a small fortune in educating your son, a second small fortune in starting him, and a third small fortune in keeping him going, and if he has the constitution of an iron horse, the nerves of a rhinoceros, and wonderful luck, he may, when he is getting grey, begin to do pretty well in the medical profession. But he will be lucky above the average if he makes more than three per cent. on the money invested.’

The medical idea was forthwith abandoned.

Month after month passed away, and I did not decide upon a profession. I was tired of larking and idling. My father continually quarrelled with my mother about my laziness. My mother was vexed, and began to think that the Golden Boot, with a wholesale branch in the City, and for me to be Lord Mayor, would not be so bad, after all. Probably the Golden Boot would have had me—or rather I should have had the Golden Boot—but for a trifling accident.

Contrary to regulations, I went to the safe, helped myself to bread and jam, and left the door open. The Golden Boot tabby was an excellent mouser and a watchful thief. At tea-time it was discovered that the cat had played havoc with the butter, and the servant was sent to the nearest shop for some of the best Dorset, which she brought wrapped up in a piece of newspaper. My mother, having dug out a taste of the butter with her little finger-nail, and pronounced it good, turned it on to a plate and scraped

the newspaper with a knife. Something attracted her attention. She looked hard at the paper and sat down to read it. The tea-pot was on the fender and my father was in his chair.



‘Come, Mrs. G., I can’t wait an hour for a cup of tea. Business, Mrs. G., business.’

My mother put the piece of newspaper into her pocket, poured out the tea, and cut the bread and butter.

‘One would think that bit of paper was a five-pound note, printed over by mistake,’ said my father.

‘It may be worth all five hundred five pounds to this establishment,’ replied my mother. ‘But I shan’t tell you about it now, whilst your soul is in the shop, fitting on boots and shoes. We will talk about it over the tripe.’

Being Friday night, it was a hot supper; for on Saturdays the Golden Boot was busy and did not close till late, and there was no time for a sit-down meal.

When the tripe had disappeared, and my father had unbuttoned his waistcoat, my mother said to me :

‘Tom, how would you like to be a lawyer, rise to be Lord Chancellor, and ride in a gold coach, with four creams and crimson liveries?’

‘There you are, stuffing the boy’s head with rubbish not fit for a dust-cart. Why don’t you ask him if he would like to be the Bank of England, with a coach-and-forty to ride in?’

‘You may bully, Mr. G., but bullying won’t tie my tongue, or make me blind with my eyes open. Don’t you know Purrem and Mangles?’

‘Why, they are my lawyers, for you can’t avoid a little law when you are suing rogues or vesting savings. Moreover, my father repaired for old Mangles, and Purrem is on our books.’

‘Then,’ said my mother, taking the piece of newspaper out of her pocket, ‘just read that, and then say who is the fool.’

My father wiped his spectacles with the corner of his pocket-handkerchief, and read the following :

Wanted, in a Solicitor’s office, a respectable and intelligent youth. Salary small and progressive. Apply by letter to Messrs. Purrem and Mangles, No. 10, Parchment Buildings, Gray’s Inn.

‘What do you think of that, Mr. G.?’

‘Nothing,’ replied my father. ‘What is a lawyer’s clerk?—a drudge, who can’t hope to die worth a pound. I have known a regiment of them, but not one that I would trust with a pair of slop Oxfords, leave alone bespoke Wellingtons.’

‘And pray, Mr. G., who ever said that a lawyer’s clerk was anything? And pray, Mr. G., what is a cobbler? But I suppose every line has a beginning, and that there is such a thing as rising from nothing and nobody to be something and a somebody.’

‘Besides,’ said my father, ‘you don’t know how old that bit of paper may be. Most likely the berth has been filled up months ago.’

‘And, for all you know to the contrariwise, the bit of paper may be new, and it is likely the firm may not be suited. Anyhow, likelihood shall not stand in the way of my boy’s chance of a start. To-morrow, hail, rain, or dry, gale or no gale, to Gray’s Inn I go to see if Purrem and Mangles is still open.’

In her Sunday satin, Sunday bonnet, and Sunday gloves, my mother took me, dressed in my Sunday suit, to Parchment Buildings. Mr. Mangles told my mother that the place had been filled, and was again vacant.

‘We want a quick, fairly educated, well-conducted youth. We begin with £20 a year, and raise the screw according to merit.’

‘Well, sir, of this I am sure as I am of anything in the world, that if you want merit you can’t better my son. The doctor never thought he would be reared, and at school he topped every class. And it is not likely, Mr. Mangles, that a mother would have a boy such as he is thrown away like pea-shells, which are rubbish, behind the counter of the Golden Boot.’

‘How many boys have you, Mrs. Gummer?’

‘Tom is first and last of my family. But give me one boy who will get to the top of the tree rather than fifty without a rise in them.’

‘An only son, and Mr. Gummer doing a first-rate business. It is a pity he does not take to his father’s trade.’

‘We were thinking a little about a wholesale place in the City, but Tom prefers being a professional, and we are comfortably warm, Mr. Mangles.’

‘We will take him on trial, and if at the end of a few months he wants to go to his father’s trade—it is a fine thing to have a business cut and dried for you—we will not prevent him.’

‘Now, I do call that fair, and when Tom becomes a big lawyer, I shan’t never forget who it was as gave him his first start in the line.’

Mr. Mangles laughed, and shook hands with my mother. Then he shook my hand, told me to be at the office on Monday morning, and to do as Mr. Sallow, the manager, directed me.

‘We have a pretty few people coming into the Golden Boot, and we will do what we have never done except for the Church when there has been a charity sermon, we will put a card of your business in our show-room, and, what is more, whoever asks about a lawyer shall hear a recommendation word about Purrem and Mangles.’

‘Very kindly meant, I am sure,’ said Mr. Mangles ; ‘but we lawyers are not allowed to advertise for business. Nevertheless, any client your husband sends shall have our best attention.’

As we walked down Chancery Lane we looked at some gowns and wigs in a shop window.

‘They do look grand, Tom, and if there were lawn shirt-sleeves, a lawyer would be as imposing as a bishop. I will inquire the price.’

The shopman was rude, and asked her roughly what she wanted.

‘I want to know the price of a gown and wig, as my son here is going into the law.’

‘I dare say you think it a fine joke, but if you don’t clear out as quickly as you came in, I shall help your exit!’

My mother spoke her mind and left the shop.

‘That till, Tom, shall never feel the weight of our money. The wig I could not manage, unless I bought a second-hand theatrical and floured it, but I’ll make you a gown equal to anything they can sell, and it won’t cost half.’

My father was not pleased with our success.

‘Let him try it, Mrs. G. He will be like a goodish few lawyers I have met with, who would swop the law and their little fingers into the bargain for the trade of the Golden Boot.’

CHAPTER III.

I MEET MY MISS WRIGHT.

I BEGAN at Purrem and Mangles' with keeping the call-book, working the letter-copying press, taking the letters to the post, sketching on the blotting-paper, spinning my office-stool round on one leg, and hacking my desk with the office penknife. When a tree is cut down, and the trunk is sawn into planks, I suppose the wood is dead, but it is astonishing what a deal of chopping a desk will stand without being cut through, as if what you cut off and out grew again, like a lobster's claw. I once saw a Yankee operating on the elbow of a mahogany chair in Purrem's private room. I warned him that the firm were rather particular about their furniture.

'I reckon they can put the whittling in the bill if they are riled. But, young man, whittling is a pick-me-up help, if your brain is on its back ; and moreover, it does the wood no harm, unless you want things to last for ever, which maybe you do in this old country, which goes in for worshipping dust and rust and making

solid railroads, to last ten thousand years after balloons have beaten them out of creation.'

Perhaps I have a genius for the law. Certain it is I got into the work without any trouble. Before I had been two years at Purrem and Mangles', I was outdoor clerk, doing the business at the public offices ; and when I came of age I was second clerk, that is outdoor manager, with two-ten a week and tippings. Wise clients are civil to managing clerks, for it is the clerk who can push an action on or delay it. Also the Junior Bar is polite to managing clerks, for they give away the briefs. It is not the solicitors, but their clerks, who make the Bar and the Bench. I should say that my tippings came to over fifty pounds a year.

My mother was delighted. From the day I entered the office she spoke of me as a lawyer, and talked confidently about the gilt coach and four creams.

'Depend upon it, father, though we may not see it till we are both in heaven, Tom will rise until he is at the very tip-top, and Lord Chancellor.'

I once tried to explain to her the difference between a solicitor and a barrister, and that only barristers become judges. She replied that a lawyer was a lawyer, that Rome was not built in an hour, and that everything and everybody must have a beginning.

I never had a chance of getting on at the law. I hate the cant about self-made men. Some neglect opportunities, but no man can make opportunities.

How could I get on at the law without being articled ? And as my firm would not give articles, and I had no money to buy them, how could I get them ? The earth, they say, is always spinning round, which I see no reason for believing ; but if it is true, it must have been set agoing.

Perhaps I should have been articled but for the stamps.

‘No,’ said my mother, ‘not a farthing of what we have got by honest toil and pinch shall go to a grabbing Government except what we are obliged to pay. Rates and taxes are robbery enough, and Tom will rise to his coach and creams in spite of a drain-pocket Government.

As a clerk, I was better off without articles. If there is any brain sauce in your calf’s head, and you are articled, no solicitor will trust you. An articled clerk may decoy clients and set up for himself. Not being articled, I became Purrem and Mangles’ confidential ; and when I was twenty-five I pocketed my four-ten a week, and my tips were a pretty addition. Our clients were affectionately obliging, and so were our junior counsel.

To be twenty-five, in good health, say rather good-looking, with just enough work to keep up the appetite for pleasure, and with money enough to be comfortable, but not enough to tempt you into extravagance, appears an easy condition. Too easy to be very happy. A man wants something to care for and to live for. Without exercise, the body grows flabby and

unhealthy, and it is the same with the inner chap. So I never repented the plunge I took in my twenty-fifth year.

There was a play out at the Haymarket worth seeing, and consequently orders were not plentiful. I generally had a pass for the theatres, and then I was a dress-circler. When I had to pay I went into the pit, and before the pit was spoilt by too many rows of stalls it was the best part of the house. On this particular night two ladies were sitting in front of me. One was a girl who might have been nearly out of her teens, and the other was old enough to be her mother. Do what I would I could not keep my eyes off the young one. I admired her waist and her hair. Not a waist too big to get round, nor yet a wasp-waist, but a delicious squeezable waist. The hair was brown, long, and wavy, and I couldn't help touching it, as if by accident. At the end of the first piece, when she stood up and turned round to look at the house, I thought I had never seen such eyes, such a face, and such a figure! It was a draft on my heart at sight, and was duly honoured. I said to myself, 'Don't be a goose, Gummer;' but my eyes would not keep off the charmer, and the more I looked the more I was overcome. I lent the ladies my bill of the play, and tried to get into conversation; but the young lady was mum, and the old one was like a parrot who had only learnt to say 'yes' and 'no.' Their reserve did not break the spell, but the reverse. The colder it is, the brighter the fire burns; and it is the same with

love-making, particularly in the first stage of the complaint.

What torture I was in for well-nigh three hours. Thinks I, 'Such a splendid girl is sure to be engaged;' and I never hated any human creature as I did the possible lover of the young lady. Then I thought: 'Nonsense; a fellow engaged to such a girl would not let her go to the theatre without him;' and for half a minute I was cheerful. Then I became miserable and dejected. Who was she? Where did she live? How could I see her again?

I went out of the theatre at the beginning of an act, and made a bargain with a hansom. I tipped him half a sovereign to be in waiting for me whenever I came out of the theatre, and told him that I might require him to follow a cab, and that if I did, and he kept it in sight without being seen to follow, it should be double fare and a crown to boot. I swallowed a glass of stout, stood the hansom three of cold gin, and returned to the pit.

If they walked I should be right. If they took a cab I should be right. But suppose they went home by omnibus? It would not do to get into the same omnibus and get out at the same time; and it was so awkward to follow an omnibus in a cab. Well, I am lucky. I got into the law through the Golden Boot cat stealing the butter, and through a faint I landed a wife.

The theatre was crammed. The gentlemen's collars were limp, pocket-handkerchiefs were used as face and

head-mops, and the delicate sex was violently fanning itself. The old lady put her hand upon the young lady's arm, and said :

‘Tilda, I do feel so awful faint.’

‘Oh, aunt, don't go off, and do come out into the open. Do, dear. Don't give way. Do keep up till you are in the open!’

The aunt was so nearly off that Matilda could not support her. I came to the rescue and held up the aunt, and well-nigh carried her out of the pit; and it is no joke to hold up fourteen stone of fainting female flesh, five feet high and nearly the same round.

‘Oh, thank you, sir,’ said the niece; ‘for my aunt is such a bad fainter, and when she goes right down off, she comes to with screaming hysterics that is a trial to the hardest beetle hearing that ever was known.’

I lowered the aunt on to a chair in the lobby. We gave her cold water, which she did not seem to relish. We took off her gloves and rubbed her hands. We held smelling-salts under her nostrils. People crowded round and looked at her as if she were an octopus. or some other uncommon animal, going through its performances. Some called her a ‘poor dear.’ Others exclaimed, ‘How bad she looks!’ A lady, with a hard face and thin voice, one of the regular ground toaders, who feel for nothing and for nobody, said, ‘Fainting persons should stop at home.’

‘If brutes,’ said Matilda, ‘kept their mouths shut, and minded their own business, they would be quite as pleasant.’



When she turned round to look at the house I thought I had never seen such eyes, such a face, and such a figure.

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There was a general chorus of 'Ah, indeed!' 'Poor, dear thing!' and the ground toader, finding she was in a minority of one, tried to exalt the tip of her nose, and retreated to the theatre.

'If, doctor, you don't object to a little cold spirits and water, I know it will bring aunt to herself sooner than all the physic in the world. She is used to being took faint and coming to herself on cold brandy and water.'

So the charming Matilda took me for a doctor! I did not undeceive her at the moment.

An attendant brought a shilling's-worth of brandy and water, that is, sixpennyworth of brandy and sixpennyworth of water, less the theatre-refreshment-profit on the spirit. The aunt pushed the glass from her until she was persuaded to taste it, and then she drank the mixture without further coaxing.

'We will take a cab,' said Matilda. 'Perhaps, doctor, you would be so good as to keep an eye on aunt whilst I make a bargain.'

'Tilda, I can bear the 'bus, and there is no need in the wide world for cabbings it, which, from this part to our part, is all half-a-crown, and being sworn at.

'Nonsense, aunt; for the sake of two shillings extra, chancing hysterics in a 'bus! And if the cabby does swear, his swearing won't be our disgrace, and it is not we who will be fined for it here or hereafter.'

I said that I would arrange about the fare, and drive part of the way with them, for fear the aunt had a relapse.

‘You are very good, sir,’ said Matilda ; ‘and with a gentleman there is no need for a bargain. But with ladies, when they are alone, it is different ; for cabbies make a point of highwaymanning ladies whom they take up without a gentleman.’

The aunt and niece were seated at the back of the cab. I sat opposite the niece, to give the aunt room to put her feet up on the front seat. When I was telling cabby to drive to Bayham Street, Islington, my retained hansom cab came up. I threw him half-a-crown, and he had the discretion to move off without a word.

It was an exciting ride. At first the aunt was giddy, and I helped the niece to hold her, and, somehow, my hand came in contact with the niece’s hand. When I lowered the window to tell the driver to go slowly, or put it up because the aunt shivered, or put it down again because the aunt felt too warm, the niece always tried to save me trouble, and, somehow, my hand always touched her hand. If her hand had been an electrifying eel it could not have been more thrilling. Presently the aunt said she felt better, leant back, shut her eyes, told the niece that she was not going to sleep, and in about two minutes began to make a noise like that of the cawing of half-a-dozen crows with colds in their heads. The position was tempting and trying. No sooner did the aunt snore than the niece became formal as a speaking doll, which can only say ‘yes,’ or ‘no.’ I longed to take her hand, and I might have done so, and mortally offended her, if my feelings had

not found relief by pressing what I thought was her foot. I pressed my foot at first gently, and then harder and harder, until I wondered she did not move her foot or push mine away, and I did not altogether like her taking it so kindly. When we arrived at Bayham Street, I found that my affectionate pressing had not been on Matilda's foot, but on an old rug that was rucked up at the bottom of the cab. Then I was savage that I had not pressed Matilda's foot.

In the parlour there was a supper laid on the table, consisting of a plate of beef and ham, cut very thin, a little saucer of pickled cabbage, and a jug of porter covered with 'Paradise Lost.' The aunt explained that they were without a regular servant, and had to get their supper in before they went out. She also said that the Rainbow porter was equal to stout in body, and did not drink stale from being kept for a few hours, if it was poured out with a head.

I took some supper, not that I wanted to eat, but as an excuse for remaining a little longer with the charmer. The aunt drank more brandy and water, and as she showed signs of sleepiness, the niece thought her aunt would be better in bed. I was obliged to act upon the hint. When I shook the aunt's hand I said I would call again if she would allow me. As the charmer asked me for a prescription for the patient, I was compelled to explain I was not a doctor, but in the law.

The aunt said if I was not contrariwise particularly engaged, and would pick a shrimp with them on

Sunday afternoon at five o'clock over a cup of tea, she would be proud.

Matilda saw me to the door. The passage was narrow and dark, and I could not help my arm going round her waist and my lips touching her cheeks.

‘How dare you be so free? Taking a girl off her guard, with her aunt hardly out of the hysterics, is not manners that this party will put up with.’

I assured her I was very sorry, and that I would not do so again.

‘Mind you don’t; for if you do, you have seen the last of Matilda Brace if you had a hundred pair of the best-seeing eyes ever put into a head.’

CHAPTER IV.

BILLING AND COOING.

MATILDA was an orphan, living with her aunt, an unencumbered hundred-a-year widow. But though Matilda lived with her aunt, she did not live on her aunt. She was a first-hand waistcoat-maker, and earned over a pound a week.

‘My aunt being a kind soul is no reason why a girl with a pair of hands and a living trade at her finger-ends is to be a carbuncle on her, eating up her last morsel. Moreover, other people’s bread is not the sort of food that Matilda Brace can relish and grow fat upon.’

I was nervous enough over that first Sunday tea and shrimps. I do not know a more trying fish than shrimps, particularly those small brown Gravesenders, and I often think of what Matilda once said when she had been nearly choked by a herring-bone :

‘Well, I do declare that the ways of Providence are a puzzle. Fish is made to be eaten, and why, then, should it have scales, and skin, and bones that cannot be eaten? But it don’t follow, as some fools I have

heard talking try to argue, that there are no fish, or they made themselves, and were not made for us, because we don't happen to see the reason why for skin, scales, and bones. And, to be sure, sole-skins do fine coffee.'

I tried to pick some shrimps for Matilda. The be-heading, betailing, and pulling off the legs is easy enough, but skinning the bodies requires practice. I spoilt three out of six, and of the three I put on Matilda's plate, the best part of their bodies had gone with their heads, tails, legs, and skins. Matilda saw I was a novice at shrimp-picking, and told me to pick for myself.

I was invited for the following Sunday, but I called on the Tuesday with some flowers for Matilda and some fish for the aunt. After that, I was often at Bayham Street, that is, about three times a week, besides Sundays. That went on for a month, without my making any progress in the way of an engagement. When I spoke of love, Matilda told me not to talk nonsense; and whenever I was getting very much in earnest, the aunt was sure to pop into the room and floor me. However, my chance came at last. I called one evening when the aunt had gone to a tea-drinking. Matilda said she was busy, and that I must not stop. But I did not obey her marching-order. Being alone with Matilda, I made up my mind to know my fate. So, when she as usual told me not to talk nonsense, I replied that it was not nonsense, for I loved her more

than life, and that I could never be happy unless she loved me and became my wife.

Matilda, who was sitting on the sofa, blushed and held down her head, and said not a word. So I got quite close to her, put one arm round her waist, and took one of her hands.

This may seem very foolish to strangers, but it was not foolish to me then ; and when I recall it now, I do not think it was foolish. Please don't laugh at what I write about my love-making. It was a great event to me and to Matilda.

'My dearest,' I whispered, 'do tell me if you can love me as I love you? Or if you will try to love me ever so little? And oh, my dearest, don't say no. You couldn't if you knew half how I love you.'

Matilda pushed my arm from round her waist, though she still let me hold her hand.

'You might guess that I feel something for you, or you would not have been here constant, as if Bayham Street were your native home.'

Thereupon I again put my arm round her waist and squeezed her as if I wanted to break her in two. I suppose girls are made to be squeezed round the waist. What they go through in that way, and even enjoy, would kill men. Moreover, I kissed her about six times in a minute.

Matilda was angry, or at least she pretended to be so.

'If you are not quiet, and fly out in that way again, you will see no more of me until aunt comes in. Kiss-

ing me as if I was a Pope's toe, and squeezing me as if I was a lemonade lemon you had bought and paid for.'

'Matilda, it is rather hard upon me to tell me with one breath that you love me, and with the next scold me for kissing you.'

'Love I did not say, though I did not deny a taking to you. But if I did love you, and desperate, it does not follow that there is nothing to forbid the banns.'

'You love another!' said I, fiercely.

'No, I don't, Mr. Gummer, and I don't thank you for the compliment in supposing that my heart is double-faced, and that I would be so demeaned as to lead on one young man whilst my affections were placed on another, behind his back.'

'My dearest,' said I, pressing her hand, 'you are cruel to say that I think anything bad about you. But what can a fellow suppose if he loves a girl, and the girl loves him, and yet she will not have him?'

'Well,' said Matilda, 'I will tell you what keeps me backward, when otherwise I might be willing enough to say 'yes' to your 'will you.' From the day I could first walk alone until I was an orphan—and the last was not so very long ago—I was over head and ears steeped and simmering, and often right-down boiling, in poverty. It makes me sorry and savage when I think of what a life my poor dear mother led, and also my father, who was a good man, though he did not know how to put a penny in his pocket that was not spent a month before he got it. Debts, and duns, and

brokers, and being sold up, and everything we had at the pawnshop, and seldom being certain of the next meal, was what I was brought up to. And how am I off now? What I stand upright in and my best clothes, a gold watch and chain, and seventeen odd pounds in the savings'-bank, is the all-told sum of my property, which is rich compared to being in debt and dunned and writ-served, but it is not a fortune. And how are you off? You are well provided so long as one hat covers all the mouths you have to feed and bodies to clothe, and you are in work; but suppose you were ill, or your situation was lost—and situations are not certainties unless you are under the Government, and it don't do to be counting on uncertainties as if they were hatched eggs—for, as I was saying, you might be turned astray, and, with a family clinging to your coat-tails, what would there be for you to fall back upon but a bare floor and an empty cupboard? So don't think me unkind, Mr. Gummer, or that my feelings are cold.'

Whilst Matilda was speaking, my love grew stronger and stronger, and I felt such a pity for her suffering and such a wish to make her happy. And I think, before I answered her a word, she must have known the thought of my heart, for I again put my arm round her waist and kissed her hand, and she was not angry, and did not push me away.

I told her what I had at Purrem and Mangles', and how, being an experienced clerk, I could always get an equal situation. I also told her that, being the only son of the Golden Boot, I might look forward to

thousands, though I hoped it would be a far, far-off day before they came to me.

‘The only son of a business that has fed and brought up a family and also laid by a fortune, and the only son not taking to the business, but in a situation, at the mercy of some one who can cut you adrift any day he chooses to give you notice, is what I don’t understand, and don’t like; for if you are out with your father and your mother, you would be out with a wife. As father used to say, Tell me what the son is, and I will tell you what the husband will be. If the bird ain’t happy in the nest it was hatched in, it won’t be happy in the nest it builds.’

Matilda drew away from me until I told her that I was not unfriendly with my father or mother, and my mother would not let me be in the business.

‘A halfpenny-worth of bread, done up French-roll fashion, may be more genteel, but I would rather have a big loaf any shape, with enough to eat and something in the cupboard.’

Fortunately, the aunt was detained at her friend’s by spasms after green tea and crumpets, and we had time to talk it over. Before the aunt came home I had kissed Matilda ever so many times, and she had put her lips to mine, and called me ‘my dear,’ and promised to be my wife. When we heard the aunt coming in Matilda told me to sit at the other side of the table, and she took up a piece of work and began stitching. But the aunt, who was sharpened by a brandy-hot to cure the spasms, looked at one and the other, and was

not deceived by the manœuvre. Anyone could see Matilda had been crying, leave alone the blush, that became a fiery red as her aunt stared at her. I think the aunt would have lectured us, but the spasms came on again, and in mixing the brandy-and-water, I put in an extra drop of the spirit.

I was happy that night. After I had kissed Matilda in the passage, and been kissed by her, I was obliged to run along the streets for nearly a mile. Then I sauntered, looking at the moon and the stars, and thinking of Matilda and of our happiness to be, when we were married. Then I had another run, and then another saunter, and so running and sauntering I went all the way to Bow on foot, and did not feel the least tired. But I pretended to be very tired when I arrived at the Golden Boot, and after just tasting some supper that had been kept for me, I went to bed—that is, to my bedroom. For I longed to be alone to think of my love, and to kiss a strip of velvet that I had taken from her throat, and that I had kissed now and then on my way to Bow. I wrote a long letter to Matilda, and then went to bed with the strip of velvet under my pillow.

If I had a word to say against Matilda, I should not say it; for, as Mrs. Gummer says, it does not become a man, and is foolish, to pick holes in his own flesh and blood. So far from finding fault, I maintain that a fellow who could get a counterpart of my lease for life would be uncommonly lucky. But it is no offence to remark that Mrs. Gummer, being a woman, though

one of the best of her sex, is not quite the same after as she was before marriage. What a sweet angel my Matilda was in the courting days! Nothing could ruffle her temper. My wish was her law. After marriage, it became just the other way, and my law was her wish ; and, being such a woman, I was none the worse for it.

We were very fond, and even romantic lovers. Although I spent every evening at Bayham Street, we wrote to each other every morning, and we bargained to be in time for the ten o'clock post, so that we



received the letters about two o'clock, and every letter had a postscript of blots, which stood for kisses. It was summer-time, and we took evening walks, except when we visited the theatre. Islington is a brick-and-mortar and paving-stone place, but by walking a

mile or two we found some green fields and pretty secluded spots, where we could speak without listeners at our elbows. I used to recite poetry, and Matilda would squeeze my arm and say it was so beautiful.

Some people may think that a lawyer's clerk and a girl who got her living by waistcoat-making could not feel poetical. But in the sweet flowers of the field that only children love and care to gather there is poetry, and sure I am that there is poetry in the heart

of the lowliest, though it may never bloom, or only bloom to fade away for want of sunshine. I often think I was born to be a poet; but, as Mrs. G. says, what you are born to you come to; and an acorn being born for an oak won't grow into a rose-tree, even if so be it had that fancy.

The Golden Boot was puzzled, for Matilda insisted upon waiting a month before I told anyone of our love affair. I was never at home except to sleep, and to dinner on Sunday. My mother consoled herself with the idea that I was getting into society.

'Tom,' she said, when she was helping the Sunday pie, 'of course, we don't find fault with you for going out, for you can't rise in life if you don't know people; and of course being in a profession, it is not everybody that you can ask to the Golden Boot. But take care of your health, Tom, for you don't eat as you used to do. Once to meat and once to pie is no dinner for a young man of your age.'

'Gammon!' said my father. 'It is not being out every night till after all decent people are in the middle of their first sleep that gets a young man on in life. And as for not asking people to the Golden Boot, those who shake hands with a lawyer's clerk would be proud to wipe their boots on the mat of a flourishing shop, with the proprietor in the vestry, likewise a commissioner of paving, and a churchwarden.'

'Of course, you will degrade the boy,' said my mother, fiercely lifting up the cup in the pie to let out the syrup. 'I don't suppose Tom is ashamed of the

Golden Boot, but law is not leather, and it won't frequent a house over a shop.'

'Anyhow,' rejoined my father, as he pushed his plate along the table for some more pie, 'the Golden Boot is not a night-porter inn, and its door is not going to banged every night about twelve o'clock, when it is not later. If Tom can't come home earlier, he may just set up for himself. I dare say he can find a girl who won't object to the name of Gummer, and to saddle him with her shoe-bill for life. So just mind what I say, Tom.'

'And, Tom, just you mind my words,' said my mother, splashing the cloth as she threw some fruit on to my father's plate. 'You shall not be drove from your home, and the day you leave the Golden Boot I leave it with you, and I'll have my rights. Talking about a boy who is to rise in the law blighting his prospects by marrying. I'd marry him, and the girl too.'

I was rather uncomfortable that afternoon on my way to Bayham Street. But I was perfectly happy when Matilda opened the door and I had kissed her. I did not forget the Golden Boot, but I persuaded myself that my mother would love Matilda when she knew her.

CHAPTER V.

MARRIED, MOONED, AND SETTLED.

MATILDA was quite sure that her aunt would be cross about the engagement, but instead of that she was most agreeable ; and, when Matilda talked of putting the marriage off for a year, said that she hated long courtships, and when a couple had made up their minds that it was to be a case of ringdove, the sooner they were made one the more agreeable for their own feelings and for others. The fact is, aunt herself had a matrimonial spec. in her eye, and it is rather a hindrance to a lady past her prime to be always seen with a young woman in her bloom. Aunt's intended venture was a gentleman who had been in the retail tin and iron line ; but the partnership did not come off. Aunt's hundred a year was an annuity that died with her, and most likely that was a cooler to the retired ironmonger. However, the prospect of a second marriage prevented any unpleasantness at Bayham Street about our engagement.

It was otherwise at the Golden Boot. At the expiration of the month, when I told about the affair,

my mother called Matilda a designing minx, and declared that she would never see the creature nor any of her lot. My father said I was a fool to undertake the shoeing of a family before I was sure of being able to keep my own feet dry on a rainy day. He asked me if Matilda was the daughter of a Mr. William Brace, who formerly lived at Bow. I told him she was. My father unlocked the accounts' cupboard, took out a faded and inky book, put on his spectacles, and looked over the pages until he sighted the name of William Brace, who, about twenty years before, had dealt at the Golden Boot, and had obtained credit to the amount of £2 14s.

‘There it is, sir, upright and downright, in plain English figures that could not be mistook by a foreigner. Two fourteen against William Brace, the father of your blessed catch, which is his first account and his last, for never did I palm a coin of William Brace’s. That is a nice sort of family to plant upon the Golden Boot, that, I am proud to say, never owed the value of a broken tag.’

I had been taught to regard not paying the Golden Boot as the worst sin a man could commit, and for a moment I almost regretted that I loved Matilda Brace. But I reflected that my dear girl could not help her father’s poverty, and I resolved to smooth over the disagreeable. I said I was sure the debt had slipped Mr. Brace’s memory, and that his daughter would see it paid.

‘And I say, sir, that a fellow as forgets what he owes

to an honest tradesman is a rogue in the skin, in the tanning and in the making up. Slipping his memory did not pay my debt, and, moreover, there was no slipping of memory, for Brace slipt through the Court and scheduled the Golden Boot !'

That was horrible, and for weeks I did not again mention the engagement. My father came round at last when I told him how hard Matilda worked, and that she had saved money.

'To be sure, Tom, we don't choose our fathers and mothers ; and if a parent walks slipshod, and takes a course that is awry from what I call fair and solvent toe-and-heel tread, the offspring is not to be cut for it. Being a saving girl, she will not run you down at heel, and it is your right, the same as every other man, to make a fool of yourself for once. What a mercy it is that the law don't allow a man to make a fool of himself as often as he likes, as they do among the Turks ! But lor, Tom, the female Turks must be different to ours, for fancy having to bonnet, boot, and best-dress half a dozen wives in this country !'

I hoped, when my mother saw my match, that she would be reconciled to the marriage. Matilda and her aunt came to tea at the Golden Boot. No girl could look better or behave better, but her beauty and her manners were of no avail. When I returned after seeing her and her aunt to the omnibus, I asked what the Golden Boot thought of her. My father, who had kissed Matilda at parting, said she was a likely girl, that her shape and make were first-class, and that

she would be a comfortable clump-sole fit who would keep a man high and dry in the worst of weather.

‘That’s what I might have expected,’ exclaimed my mother. ‘I knew you would be pleased at Tom lowering himself for all the days of his life. I can see nothing in her, and as for her goodness, let her oblige her own class with it, and not clog a boy who, but for her artfulness and the artfulness of the man-cadging aunt, might have rose to his coach-and-creams.’

All my talking and coaxing could not prevail upon my mother to go further than say that I must marry if I chose, but not to bother her about the wedding, and never to accuse her of having, like my father, persuaded me to let a coy-duck minx fling my prospects into the gutter.

It was according to human nature for my mother to continue her opposition, and for my father to be reconciled. Unless there is a fortune, a mother rarely thinks any girl good enough for her son, except he is such a bad one as to want a keeper to look after him, and a father never thinks any man good enough for his daughter. On the other hand, fathers seldom object to the marriages of their sons, nor mothers to the marriages of their daughters.

When my long-vacation holiday came round, we married. The aunt wanted a grand wedding, but Matilda objected to making a show of ourselves. So we went to Islington Church in a neat brougham, with two bridesmaids, friends of the bride, and at the church we met two friends of mine, one of whom took the part

of father and gave away Matilda. For half a guinea to the curate, two-and-sixpence to the clerk, who did very little, and one shilling to the pew-opener, who did nothing, we were tied as tightly as if it had been a license marriage, with carriages and fours, and a bishop, and a pastrycook's breakfast. After Matilda had signed the name of Brace for the last time, we returned to Bayham Street, and tried to amuse ourselves until twelve o'clock, when we sat down to a sensible lunch, with no stint of wine. At three o'clock we started for Chigwell, to spend our honeymoon, or, rather, our honey-fortnight. And a fortnight of each other's society, and with nothing to do, is enough for any couple.

. We had not been three days man and wife before we had a trifling squabble on account of the landlady. Matilda strongly objects to being robbed, and the person who accommodated us with furnished lodgings was a regular purloiner. The best of our tea was poured off before the pot was sent to the parlour. If Matilda gave out six potatoes, only four appeared in the dish. Our meat was soddened before a slow fire to save the coals, and overcooked for the sake of the dripping. A quart of fruit was bought for a large pie, and when the pie was opened we found a big breakfast-cup and about a pint of fruit. Matilda was wroth and the landlady was impertinent. She had been housekeeping for twenty years, and it was the first time anyone had dared to accuse her of putting her fingers on what was not her own. I suggested that, as it was only for a fortnight, it would be better to avoid any dispute.

‘Now, Tom,’ said Matilda, ‘if you suppose that Matilda Brace as was, and Matilda Gummer as is, will be skinned and bled alive, you don’t know her. Moreover, though you do think it worth your while to side with a picker and stealer against your lawful wedded wife, I don’t stand it. If I had known this was to be my treatment, you should never have taken me to church on a week-day, not if there hadn’t been another man in the world.’

Fancy my surprise at hearing a turtle-dove screech almost like an owl! There is a saying that you can never know a person till you live with him or her. That is true, but how soon you do know the person when you live with her! I am not finding fault with Mrs. Gummer, who, even in the matter of temper, is far superior to the run of her sex; but still she has a temper, and in courting-time a girl never shows her temper.

Mrs. Gummer puts it the other way. She says that a woman may be cool-tempered as a flint, and in courtship the man is all honey; and when he is married and turns steel, of course there are sparks from the flint he hits.

Our next tiff was, I think, also Matilda’s fault. We had been to town, for after a week at Chigwell we were tired of the country, and returned part of the way by omnibus. From the time we left the omnibus all the words I could get out of Matilda were, ‘Yes,’ ‘No,’ ‘Oh!’ and ‘Indeed!’ After we arrived at our lodgings there was an alarming sharpness and jerkiness about

Matilda's movements. When the tea was poured out I asked her if anything had vexed her.

'Yes, I am vexed ; and depend upon it, Mr. Gummer, it will be a blue moon, and a blue sun too, before you have the chance of again trampling on your lawful wedded wife in public.'

'My dear Matilda, you astonish me !'

'Oh, can't you act ! But your acting, though it is clever, won't make me believe that I didn't see what I did see. There were some women in the 'bus, not well dressed and not painted, and no help did you give them. But when that made-up creature got in, dressed in a way that no 'bus-rider could honestly pay for, you did help her. And, moreover, all the 'bus could see that you could not keep your eyes off her. Flirt behind my back with made-up he-trappers, and welcome, but flirt with them under the very nose of your lawful wedded wife you shan't ! And for the matter of that, get a divorce, and marry one of the painted cats who can change her face and figure seven times a week, and then you can be a Mormon with seven sorts of wives, and only one to keep.'

The quarrel lasted till next tea-time, when, to my utter amazement, Matilda admitted that she was not altogether in the right.

'Of course, Tom, men will be fooled by old crows with painted faces and showy feathers, and I ought not to have taken on about it. Poor Pa used to say—and setting aside supporting himself and family, he was a genius—that heart disease, by which he meant love,

was sure to cause jaundice, by which he meant jealousy. And, Tom, I do believe I had a touch of the complaint yesterday. I never had what poor Pa called the red fever, for I did not like army officers, they being out of my sphere; and I never had the black fever, for curates can't look at a girl whose only fortune is her fingers; and I never had the yellow fever, Tom, for if I had been on the look-out for money I should have kept single till I met with some one in trade who fancied me. But what poor Pa called the jaundice is worse than any of the fevers, and I think too much of what is due to myself ever to have it again.'

Our tiff No. 3 was about domestic arrangements. We had bought a house at Bow, and for two or three months we had been buying furniture. Most of our goods and chattels had been picked up at brokers' shops, and some of Matilda's purchases were wonderful bargains. I had thought of renting a house, but Matilda had stoutly opposed that plan.

'No, my dear; it's the rent that keeps people under water. Even my poor Pa would not have been a sinker without a straw to clutch at if it had not been for the rent, which never could be met. We will go into a building society, my dear, and with our first-floor let we shall be rent-free, with the house our own for nothing after ten years.'

In courting-time I never argued with, much less contradicted, Matilda, and so, having both friends and clients who were building-society swells, I became a brick-and-mortar freeholder of two adjoining houses,

subject to paying so much a month for ten or eleven years.

Our honey-fortnight was pretty nigh over, when Matilda suggested that we should draw out an advertisement for our first-floor furnished.

‘For, Tom, my dear, every week we are unlet is loss of a week’s rent, and however well off we may become, a loss, whether it be a pound or a penny, is our being so much the poorer all the days of our life.’

I prepared an advertisement, offering a well-furnished first-floor to a married couple, without children, or to two ladies.

‘No, Tom, not if I happen to be aware of it, and in one of my seven senses. A married couple that lives in furnished apartments ought to be ashamed of themselves, for I hold that a woman should be lord of her own castle, though it is only ‘a hut. As for two ladies under the roof I pay for, not for Matilda Gummer. Single gentlemen, who don’t spoil the furniture, who don’t interfere, and who are out from breakfast to tea, are the first-floorers that we want, and will have, Tom.’

‘Really, Matilda, for once I must have my own way. I object to single men in my house.’

‘Indeed, sir! And pray why, sir? Perhaps you think I shall be for letting fellows make up to me, which, not being done when my third finger was bare, is not likely to take place when it is ringed.’

It was jealousy, but I did not wish Matilda to think so.

‘No, my dear, I am not afraid of you ; but people will talk, and I won’t give them the chance.’

‘Stuff about talk. Gossip is like mud-throwing, Tom, and don’t hurt them whose conduct is above it, and ever so far out of reach of the mud-throwers. And your jealousy is goosey foolish, besides being an insult. An apple-tree will grow apples, though it is left to look after itself ; but if your wife is a thistle-bush, it is no use putting her in a glass case, and be for ever watching, for if you watch with all your eyes the fruit will be thistles, and not ribston pippins.’

But I could not agree to single lodgers. The more I thought of it the more jealous I became. Matilda sulked with her food, called me ‘Mr. Gummer,’ and, when I kissed her, offered me her cheek or kept her lips close and motionless as marble. For the first and last time in her life Matilda gave in.

‘Well, Tom, we being married, and taken for better or worse, by our own act and deed, it would only make us miserable and bring us to a dead stop to be pulling against each other. And being jealous is a worse compliment to yourself than to me, for it shows that you think I am worth looking after, and that others are as likely to be my choice as you are. So, Tom, I give up single first-floorers and you may have your married couple without a family, or your unmarried old cats. But, Tom, whether your first-floorers are married without incumbrance, or misses as might have been grandmothers if anyone had fancied them, no woman first-

floorer shall ever do her bouncing over Mrs. Gummer in her own house.'

Probably we should have had tiff No. 4, but our honey-fortnight was over, and when we were in our own place, and Matilda had the home to attend to, and I was at business from morning till night, we were much happier, and not nearly so inclined to quarrel.

'Tom,' said Mrs. Gummer, 'if we had to marry over again, we would have no mooning, except for a day or two. People with nothing to do are like a cat and dog shut up in a cage, and are sure to fall out, unless they have been trained to the happy-family line. Forcing a couple to be together for weeks at a time before they have got used to the soft corns of each other's temper, is the way to make them hate each other for life. A man at home for a day is no treat to a wife. For you see, Tom, it's a man's nature to be about his business. If I had a girl who wanted to marry against my will, I would let the young man come a-courting from morning till night, and that would soon tire the pair of them.'

Young lovers will think that Matilda's observations are not poetical, but when they have been married for a month or two, they will find them true. Since the Divorce Court was set up, our Purrem and Mangles have done a good deal in the line ; and I notice that in nine cases out of ten, when a marriage comes to grief, the man has been a gentleman with very little occupation, except to spend the money he did not earn, and to wrangle with his wife.

CHAPTER VI.

'TWIN'T PORT AND PORT



WHEN I determined to write the story of my life, I went to a stationer's and invested in a gross of steel pens, a quart of black ink, a quire of blotting-paper, and two reams of extra-size blue-wove letter paper. I did not suppose that the two reams would be enough for my book. Before putting pen to paper, I thought that I should not be able to record my life in less than six volumes, and now that I have done my birth, education, youth, and marriage, I am not sure that I can fill one volume. I look upon an author as a sort of gold-beater, or perhaps a wire-drawer. What a long story he can make out of next to nothing! But I am not an author, and all I can do

is to put down just what I remember, and put it down, too, in a most unauthorlike way. A regular author begins with the middle of his tale, works backward to the beginning, and, before you know where you are, comes to the end, To oblige Mrs. Gummer, I tried the plan ; but, after tearing up two or three quires of my paper, and worrying myself into half-a-dozen back-headaches, I was obliged to begin with my birth at the Golden Boot, and jog-trot on according to dates and circumstances.

In this chapter I shall jump twenty years. Suppose you are not a public character, and you get married and settled, and sit down to write your life from the end of the honeymoon until you have daughters ready for honeymooning, you will find it hard to fill a dozen sheets of letter-paper. Two years after my marriage I had to go to America with a commission to take evidence, and I promised Matilda to keep a diary. There was bustle and excitement at the start, and the same at landing, but we had fair weather, and my diary was well-nigh a blank from port to port. After entering the events of one day, I had only to write ditto for the other days. Matilda declared that I had forgotten her, and that I had been too busy flirting with 'a creature' to keep a diary. I take it that the ordinary life of an ordinary man is like a sea voyage. A little stir at the outset, and then nothing to write about until there are signs of nearing the other shore.

Nancy and Janet are our only children. In our opinion finer babies were never seen, and they grew to

be clever and beautiful girls. When the children were young my father died, and my mother did not long survive him. The Golden Boot was sold off, and the estate was a disappointment. I did not get quite £1000. My father had taken to speculating, and I am sure the losses had shortened his life. I shall never forget how well Matilda behaved. I had been to the lawyer who had the management of the estate, and when I came home I felt rather awkward, just as if I had been deceiving her.

‘Matilda, what do you think is our sum-total from the Golden Boot?’

‘I never was a riddler, and I don’t mean trying it, for I don’t think it common sense to guess at what is in a letter, when it can be opened and read,’ said Matilda.

‘It’s not over £1000.’

‘Well, Tom, and what right have you to be looking gloomy because you come into a £1000 you have never earned? Not over a thousand, indeed! Pray what did my dear pa leave me? Debts, and the ticket for his gold watch and chain, which had been in pawn, on and off, for over fifteen years. Did my nose look long enough for the making of six Grecians? Did I turn to gall and vinegar because I couldn’t fatten on the butter of a last will and testament? Tom, an old bird that don’t do its best to feed its young before they are fledged, don’t deserve a nest to sleep in or a grub to eat; but also, Tom, a young bird that has been hatched, and fed, and fledged, and taught to

fly, and then is put out of temper because the old bird don't provide for it for life, is what I call downright wicked, and first of September is too good for it.'

'I am not ungrateful, Matilda; but I know you expected more.'

'And more shame if I did expect what was not mine nor yours. And, moreover, Tom, what would you say of our cat, which has all that she can eat, and is sleek as any cat in the land, if she took to pining because she has not got more than she can eat? There is your salary, which pays all and a little to put by, though, from having no son to start, the girls are being brought up as if their father was a brewer and their mother a ready-coined gold mine in her own right. Your house is your own freehold, next door ditto, and over £800 saved. Then comes £1000, and you sit looking as if the very marrow of your bones was going to be distrained for the last quarter's rent.'

Soon afterwards we had another windfall. Matilda's aunt died, and left her property to her niece. It was about £600, and I wanted to settle the money on Mrs. Gummer, but she would not have it.

'No, Gummer'—she always calls me Gummer when she speaks strongly—'no, Gummer; I won't have a settlement. When a woman has a husband who is likely to drag her into the union, I don't blame her for having a stopper on his spending for both their sakes; but that is not my lot, and I am not going to have a purse divorce, as if we were a snap-dog and a spitfire-cat couple.'

Those were happy years. Mrs. Gummer has a temper, and now and then there was a dispute; but it did not last long, and always ended by Matilda forgiving me, though I don't think I was always in fault. Well do I remember what Matilda said of Mrs. Marter. We were pretty intimate with the Marters, who lived in our road. Joe Marter was a good fellow; with a berth as buyer in a City house, bringing him in all £600 a year. He was a smart man in the City, but at home he was, as Mrs. Gummer used to say, no better than a living door-mat for his wife to trample on. Mrs. Marter always found fault with everything. Everybody was bad except herself. If Joe did not talk, she scolded him for being silent; and if he did talk she contradicted him, and a quarrel was certain. The last time we supped with them Mrs. Marter cried and called herself a brutally ill-treated woman because Joe, who was a silk-buyer, contradicted her about the price of silk.

'Tom,' said Matilda, as we were walking home, 'not liking to see a fellow-creature pecked into an early grave by a ground-toad, that is to say, by a female hawk, I've done with the Marters. Moreover, Tom, to see such a creature, who is a hive of wasps to her poor husband, thinking herself an angel of sweetness as would turn vinegar into treacle, is more than I can bear, and it gives me spasms to keep in what I want to say. But a woman, Tom, who picks holes in everybody else, and never thinks she is in fault, is sure to be an everlasting hornet's nest to her husband.'

I ventured to suggest that, perhaps, Mr. Marter did not know how to manage his wife.

‘Manage her! I tell you, Gummer, you ought to be ashamed of yourself; and it would serve you right if you had the management of Mrs. Marter for the rest of your life. But you can’t help the nature of your perverse sex. A month after marriage every man is ready to defend and praise every wife but his own.’

Matilda and I got on very well together, though she never thought she was wrong or that I was right.

But as the girls advanced in their teens there was more disagreement. They went to a grand finishing school, where they were taught all the accomplishments. They were instructed in the art of getting into a carriage, and a lot of other nonsense, which filled their heads with ideas that did not increase the happiness of our home. Somehow or other the girls managed Mrs. Gummer, and whenever there was a little dispute I was always in a minority of one. At first, Mrs. Gummer mildly reproved the ridiculous pretension of the girls, then she defended it, and at last encouraged it. If I said a word I was snubbed and reproached. One of the first serious disputes after the girls had been finished was about church. For many years we had sittings in the gallery. An offer of part of a pew in the middle aisle had been promptly refused by Mrs. Gummer.

‘No, Tom. Why should we pay ever so much extra a year for the sake of being middle-aislers? A

gallery may not be so genteel as a middle aisle, but it is cheaper; and anyhow, Tom, it is not farther off heaven than the ground-floor.'

To my surprise Mrs. Gummer and the girls suddenly discovered that we must have middle-aisle seats. I gently reminded Matilda of her former objections to the middle aisle.

'Really, Gummer,' she replied, 'your temper is worse than nettle-rash with one's hands tied. Of course you are always trying to thrust words spoken years ago down my throat. And it's not you or any other man as can eat his own words, when they are years old, without choking, for some words that are nice and wholesome, as roast beef and horseradish, when they are spoken, are poisoned thistles when they are stale. Moreover, whilst girls were in their short petticoats it would not have signified if we had been seated in the steeple. But the poor dear girls are not children, and they shan't be stuck up in a gallery, as if they were overgrown charity brats, not worth being looked at; not if they had fifty fathers, and every one of the fifty wanted to keep them down, not caring for the feelings of his poor dear girls.'

The following Sunday we called ourselves miserable sinners in one of the best pews in the middle aisle.

We had regularly attended the lectures and soirées at the Literary and Scientific Institution, and though we did not learn much from the lectures and the soirées, including tea and coffee, were not particularly lively, we liked them very well.

'Tom,' Matilda used to say, 'I hold with the Institution, because there is no botheration and expense. Of course, Tom, it is not like the theatre, any more than skim-milk and water is champagne. But then, Tom, you can't walk to the theatre, and 'bussing it two ways comes to money ; and if there were no fees and no refreshment—and I can't sit out a performance without something to keep me up—the theatre is a purse-thinner that people of limited means and girls to keep and dress can't often enjoy.'

Not long after the middle-aisle move, Mrs. Gummer and the girls announced that they should not go again to the Institution. Why not? Janet replied that they did not choose to be mixed up with a pack of tradespeople. I thought of the Golden Boot, and indignantly rebuked the girls. I reminded them that I was only a clerk, that my father was a tradesman, and that nearly all the money we had was made at the Golden Boot. Janet tossed her head and led her elder sister out of the room.

'Now, Gummer,' said Matilda, 'once and for ever, just let me tell you that my poor dear girls, not being stocks nor stones, shall not have their feelings nail-scratched and festered by their own father—no, not if he was their father fifty times over and over again. And, moreover, girls with their looks and finish, let alone the expectation of what will come from us, which is not a fortune, but enough to dress them independent of any husband, will not make their home over a shop. Because your birth-nest was in a bush,

it don't follow that my girls are to be stoned and pecked at by their own father, because they pitch their tent on the top of a tree.'

Every autumn for seventeen years we had spent three weeks at Margate. Whenever I had proposed a change Mrs. Gummer declared that she would go to Margate or stop at home.

'Gummer,' she would say, 'I hate changing for nothing, and a horse that turns its back on the water it has been drinking for years, without having to go to a veterinary in consequence, won't do better, and may have to put up with thirst, or drinking water with insect fish in it, which would be unpleasant for those who argue that mankind ought to starve cats by eating horse-beef because horses are very particular to drink only clean water. Why should you turn your back on Margate, which has set us up for the year and saved doctors' bills? If I happened to be a doctor, with a large family, I should hate Margate; but, not being a man, who has been brought up to feed his large family on other people's sickness, if my husband, who, being a changer, won't let his poor wife and growing girls have the air that sets them up for the winter, I am not going to try air that, for all I know to the contrary, may be friendly to doctors. Of course, Tom, if we were led by our ears, like certain animals are by their noses, we might believe that Margate is not genteel, though people worth their one, with ever so many noughts after it, go there. I dare say leg of mutton is not so genteel as—what was

the name of that foreign pie in a queer-shaped dish that a client gave you, and that gave me spasms and biliousness for a week ?'

'Strasbourg pie.'

'Well, Tom, leg of mutton may not be so genteel as Strasbourg pie, but a person who wanted to better his health would be a fool to take to Strasbourg pie because it is genteeler than wholesome food.'

As I always enjoyed our outing at Margate I was not very sorry that Matilda stuck to the dear old watering-place.

A year or two after the girls had been finished at school, when I told them of the office arrangement as to my holiday, and that on such a day we could be off to Margate, I was informed that they had made up their minds not to go again to Margate. It was not genteel, and as they could not go to the Isle of Wight, they would remain in town.

'Not, Gummer,' said Matilda, 'that the poor, dear girls are to be pointed at as persons too poor to go out of town just because they have a father who will thrust Margate down the throat of his family. For three weeks the front blinds shan't be raised, and we will live in the back, and it being supposed we are out of town, we may be dull, but we shan't be scorned.'

We went to the Isle of Wight, and we never enjoyed a holiday so little. Matilda was greatly annoyed when she found that it was necessary to cross the water to get to the isle. I jocosely suggested that

it was impossible to visit an island without crossing water.

‘You may joke at dragging a wife on to the sea, who, going to Greenwich, felt like a humming-top turning round on its head whilst it was sinking down a hole, and I could never have got off that steamer if it had not been for the spirit and water poor aunt always carried in her pocket. But, joke or no joke, if I had known that the Isle of Wight was a foreign part, that couldn’t be reached by dry land, that part would never have set eyes on Matilda Gummer. And, moreover, about not getting to an isle without crossing water, I want to know if we have not been year after year to the Isle of Thanet without crossing water?’

The Isle of Wight was crowded, lodgings were dear, and the thermometer was nearly three figures in the shade.

After a week, Matilda proposed that we should leave the place as soon as possible.

‘Tom, I am not a grumbler, and I have stood ironing when it was so hot that milk has turned as soon as it has been taken in; but anything equal to the heat of this place I never felt, and another fortnight of it would leave half of me here, if ever I got my other half away alive. Also one’s nerves are on the quiver at having to cross the sea. And, Tom, if one must go through what is worse than having all the teeth in one’s head drawn at a sitting by a shilling a tooth dentist, the sooner the torture is faced and over the better.’

The return voyage was not nearly so bad as Matilda

expected; indeed, with the help of a little spirit and water, she was able to sit on the deck.

‘Well, Tom, on sea, as well as on one’s native land, there’s ups and downs; and, oh dear! it’s a dreadful down when you seem to be going lower and lower, and no end to the lowering, but also there’s smooth as well as rough at sea, and as poor dear pa, for though he was not much of a doer he was a thinker, and a wonderful proverber, used to say, Man is a superficial animal, for he can’t live under the earth, or under the water, and not for many years under the sky. Well, Tom, we must put up with being what we are, but, not being a fish, no more sea for me, rough or smooth.’

We returned to Bow at the end of a fortnight, and we were more genteel than ever. The neighbours we had known for years were snubbed and cut. I was not allowed to ride outside an omnibus, nor to smoke a clay-pipe in my own garden, unless I stood between the washhouse and the dustbin, where I could not be seen. Our rooms were darkened by curtains being drawn across the windows, plenty of daylight being unfashionable. When we went to the theatre, instead of omnibus and leave your bonnet, or tuck it under your cloak, there was full dress and a fly. Mamma, who had been accustomed to substantial refreshment, was restricted to an ice and a sweet cake. The girls wanted to abolish hot suppers, and to have a six o’clock tea. Mamma did not like the change, and thanks to a Mrs. Faddle, at whose wardrobe-shop our girls bought dresses and finery, there was a compromise. Though

I never saw Mrs. Faddle, I cordially hated her. She pretended to have direct dealings with noble ladies, and told her customers why the Duchess of S—— left off that dress, and why the Countess of G—— would not wear those satin shoes a second time. The girls believed her stories, and paid dearly for her rubbish. However, Mrs. Faddle did us one good turn, by settling the dispute about the hot suppers. She informed the girls that her dear friend, the duchess, made a hearty meal at one o'clock, and took a cup of tea with buttered toast at four or five o'clock, or three hours before her eight o'clock state dinner. So our one o'clock meal was called lunch, and the last meal was at eight instead of nine o'clock, and was described as dinner. The girls tried fourteenpenny claret mixed with water, but they soon came back to their beer, which they spoke of as the infusion of malt.

‘You see, Gummer, beer is the native element of the English just as the briney sea is the native element of whales. And a whale could not live on the fresh water that suits river fish.’

We were not happier for our gentility, and Matilda, who had often sighed about the certainty of the poor, dear girls being married before they were out of their teens, began to sigh because genteel offers did not come. Nancy was just over twenty, and Janet fifteen months younger.

‘Gummer, I’ve hit it, and so ought you long ago, being in the law. But you leave the poor dear girls to grow out of their teens and into their tys till they will have

to be knocked down to the first bid, or be bought in, not having a bid, and be fifty-year old misses on the pittance left to them. For singlehooded girls are not port wine, and don't become worth more by getting old and cob-webbed.'

'They will get married when their time comes.'

'Yes, Gummer, and your cabbages will be fit for cutting and eating when their time comes, but their time would not come if they were not planted out and looked after. But as I was telling you, Tom, I've hit it, though I am not in the law. We will make the poor dear girls wards in Chancery. Then offers will come, and the poor dear girls will be run away with and settled in a style that is equal to our expectations.'

For a week I was sent to the domestic 'yes and no' Coventry because I would not consult Purrem and Mangles about the Ward in Chancery scheme.

The day I was forgiven I had Spanish onions for supper, a dish I had not tasted for months because onions are vulgar. When I was sipping my grog, Matilda said :

'Between ourselves, Gummer, though I am their mother and you their father, I will say that it would be a quick walker, and with his eyes uncommonly wide open, who could match our poor dear girls for looks in a month's march. As for being clever, besides their French, there is their music. Concert or no concert, I never heard such singing. As for drawing, it's wonderful. There's our church done by Nancy in chalk,

which is so real that you might stare at it until you thought it was Sunday and that the bells were ringing you into the picture. Moreover, they will have money in their own right. Why is it they are let alone whilst wife seekers are nibbling at inferior fruit? Not that I want to lose the poor dear girls. But I ask you, Gummer, how it is they are not snapped up?

I could only say, as I had often said before, that the girls were young, and that their time would come.

‘As to being young, it’s not that but the reverse that keeps off offers, unless you are a widow with a house already furnished and an income. But, Gummer, if girls are buried alive, it’s not likely men will propose to them. For, as poor dear pa used to say, in our times, it’s puff and show, and not} quality that succeeds; and diamonds won’t go off unless they are set and shop-windowed.’

‘I don’t know what you mean, Matilda.’

‘Of course not. It might put you out to know what I mean, and an animal which I won’t name, because it is not genteel to do so out of church, never turns which way he is pulled if he wants to go the other. But your not understanding don’t dig up our poor, dear, buried-alive girls.’

After that shot, Matilda left the room. In a few days I learnt what was meant by her saying the girls were buried-alive.

CHAPTER VII.

A GENTEEL MOVE.

THE buried-alive remark was explained on the following Saturday night, after another week of domestic yes and no Coventry. If I had been a moderately sharp observer, I might have known that something was coming. I am fond of muffins, and there had been muffins for tea. I am partial to baked potatoes, and there were baked potatoes for supper—I mean our eight o'clock dinner. Mrs. Gummer called me 'Pa.' The girls called me 'Pa, dear.' I was not contradicted the whole evening. Before the cloth was well cleared Nancy had filled my pipe. Before I had taken half a dozen whiffs Janet had mixed my grog.

At half-past nine the girls went to bed, or, rather, to bath and bed. Mrs. Gummer is very regular in domestic matters, and Saturday night is bathing night.

'Shall I mix you a little gin-and-water?'

'Well, pa, I don't mind trying a sip, for it's physic to me, especially after eating potatoes at night, which, unless they are followed by a digester, is just turning one's poor chest into a stable for nightmares.'

‘Have I mixed it right, Matilda?’ said I, handing her the grog.



‘Well, Tom,’ said Matilda, after sipping it, ‘if my taste is not gone, it is weak. But spirits are not what they used to be. Put your lips to it.’

I added some gin to the mixture, Matilda again tasted it, and nodded her head ap-

provingly. She nodded her head because, as soon as she had tasted it, she put two or three pins between her lips, and therefore could not speak.

The pins were taken out of one of the girls’ dresses, at which Mrs. Gummer was working. A more wonderful woman at her needle cannot be imagined. When a dress is soiled it is turned inside out; when the plaits are worn it is turned upside down, and the bottom trimmed; when the front breadths are shabby the skirt is gored; and when the dress can no longer be worn as a dress, it is converted into a petticoat. I have never had an entire new shirt since my marriage. The wristbands fray, and new ones are put on; the front goes, and a new one is put in; the body is worn, and, as the wristbands and front are nearly as good as new, they are rebodied. Being better off, and even rich, did not put a stop to Mrs. Gummer’s work. She could not do without it. Needling to women who are used to it is

to them what smoking is to men. Fellows who don't smoke are growlers, and women who don't sew are perpetual naggers.

Presently Matilda put the pins on the table, took a long sip of her grog, and then made a noise which was a cross between a half-suppressed groan and a half-stifled sigh.

‘Have you the spasms?’

‘No, Gummer, it's not the spasms, and bad as they are, and only those who have them know how they catch you, they would be light as swan's-down to bear compared to what is on my mind, and I can't keep it to myself no longer. And, Tom, I don't hold with a man or a woman bottling up a secret from his or her own flesh and bone, which we have been for over two-and-twenty years.’

‘Matilda, what on earth is the matter?’

‘There you are, flaring out as if our tenant had flitted, and keeping sight as I do on our next door, it would be a clever flit if he got away. But you always do flare out, and it is very hard if a wife is to be a tonguetied drudge, and bellowed at fit to split every drum in her ear if she opens her mouth.’

‘Really, Matilda, it's too bad to say I flare out. Tell me what is the matter?’

‘Oh, never mind. Of course I am not what I was two-and-twenty years ago, and well do I remember what my poor dear pa said when young Spooner was sweet on me: “Mat, if you marry and live to be old enough to see your own girls grow up, your husband

will turn on you, and when it is too late you will wish that you had lived all the days of your life with the father who loves you. A wife over forty is a whipping-top. Mat, a picked bone alone, is better than game pie with snap and slavery." Ah, poor pa, I never forget his words. Oh, never mind. You don't care about a poor, despised drudge that has been a slave ever since she set her eyes on you.'

After some coaxing and another sip of grog I was forgiven, and Matilda told me the secret trouble.

'You see, Gummer, this is how we stand. Of course, we are not a gold mine, but, for all that, we are not a cullender with nothing in it except what runs through faster than it is poured in. With savings and wind-falls, and these two houses our own, we have equal to £200 a year coming in, independent, and on which no living soul can lay the tip of a finger. Then there is your salary from Purrem and Mangles, equal to six a week, which, if they had me to deal with, would be equal to twelve a week. But show me a man who is flint to his wife, and I will show you a man who is melted butter out of doors. But I forgive your nature, Gummer, which you were born to. Without reckoning your extras, the income is all £10 a week, and with only two girls and no boy to put out in life, and with making our one pound go as far as most women's three pounds, I say that we are well off, and there is no need to hide ourselves, as if we were paupers likely to be taken up on suspicion and no bail.'

‘Yes, Matilda, we are well off. Enough to live on and to leave our girls independent.’

‘Moreover, Tom, and this house being our own as well as next door, it’s ours to let as well as to live in.’

‘What, Matilda! To let? Let the house that has been our home for two-and-twenty years? Not whilst I live will this house have any other master than Thomas Gummer.’

Mrs. Gummer snatched up her work, and began to stitch fiercely. The needle clicked against the thimble with a sharp noise, which might have been heard in the street.

‘Gummer, I am disgusted with you, though you are my twain flesh, which is my misfortune and the bad luck of my poor dear children. Are we trees, that we cannot be moved, but must be stuck in Bow until we are carried out? Not that I dislike my native place, which is also yours and the girls’. But it is not likings or dislikings that weigh on my mind fit to break my back if it were a camel’s. Duty first and fancy second, always has been and always will be the motto of Matilda Gummer, so long as she has a breath to draw and the strength to draw it.’

Click, click, click.

‘Matilda,’ said I, lighting a pipe, ‘what is your drift?’

‘Say no more, Gummer. Leastways, my drift is not to be an unnatural sexton and to bury my own offspring. I pity the poor, dear girls, and sorry am I that I borned them to be blighted by their own father, and kept down

and trod upon as if they were a paltry pair of back-street paving-stones.'

'My dear, be a little reasonable. You have not told me what you want.'

'Gummer, you are enough to turn a dove into an owl. I want to know if we are landlord's fixtures in our own freehold house, that must not be moved? And if we are not fixtures, is it not our duty to give the poor dear girls their chance, for which they were brought into the world?'

'Matilda, I am not the man to grudge a month at the sea; but there is no need to let the house whilst we are away.'

'Gummer, you would make an angel-tempered lamp-post swear. Pray, what is the use of the sea to such girls as ours? For low flirting, and for picking up stragglers who may never be worth a penny more than they spend, and empty-pursed monkeys who live on fools who trust looks, and who are no better than lawful thieves, give me sands or pier; but for girls who have looks, education, and prospects, the sea is not worth its salt.'

'Then where do you want to go for a trip?' said I, expecting to hear of a cheap excursion up the Rhine.

'We are not trippers, Gummer. I say, and I will say, that the girls ought to live in a genteel neighbourhood. The rent will be a pull, though not much if we let well here, and the clothes and living can be pared down to make up for the loss.'

'What! leave Bow for good! Leave where I have

been born and bred ! Matilda, I would rather not, and I will not ; and I don't think you could do it when it came to the going.'

'Tom, for the sake of the girls I would swim through an ocean of blazing brimstone, provided I was a swimmer and could stand burning. Suppose we took a villa in a high neighbourhood, standing in its own grounds, or at the worst semi-detached ? Mark my words, Tom, in a year or two the girls would marry on a par with their merits and what is coming to them. You know, if there were the most beautiful empresses at Bow that ever lived, and every hair of their heads was hung with a Koh-i-noor diamond, gentility would no more think of marrying them, than they would think of putting on scarlet jackets and setting off with their keepers to shoot London sparrows.'

'I suppose you would like Belgravia ?' said I, with an involuntary rise of my nose, for I was uncommonly vexed.

'Anywhere that pleases Thomas Gummer, Esquire, will please his poor, put-upon wife, provided, for the sake of the poor, innocent girls, it is not East-end.'

I could bear patiently with Mrs. Gummer's temper until she became mockingly polite.

'Hang the poor innocents !' said I. 'They are no better than their father or their mother, and what was good enough for us shall be good enough for them.'

'Oh, Gummer ! Oh, Gummer ! That ever my poor mortal ears should have lived to know a father who is not ashamed to curse his own children to their own

mother's face ! I wonder you are not afraid that your pipe might choke you.'

'There you are, as usual, snapping up the last word I speak. Will you, or will you not, listen to reason ?'

'Will you do so ? And as for listening, people who can't hear or won't understand, which is the same thing, might as well not fatigue their ears. If you were to put a pair of telescope spectacles on a blind man, do you think it would make him see an inch before his nose ? Or, if you were to feed a born-dumb party for fifty years with talking-parrot-pie, do you think it would make the dumb speak ? I tell you, Gummer, it's similar with you. All the reasoning that ever was, or ever will be, will not turn you to take into account the feelings and future of the poor dear girls.'

With that Mrs. Gummer flipped off her thimble into the basket, gathered up her work, bolted the rest of her anti-spasmodic mixture, flung herself out of the room, and went to report progress to the girls.

For a whole month I stuck to my 'No,' and the Iron Duke, with Torres Vedras to back him, could not have been more firm. But it was a case of woman's will *v.* man's won't. Nancy was gloomy, Janet was pert, and Mrs. Gummer sneered, and groaned, and moaned, and nagged continually. Nancy always had the headache, Janet was hysterical, and Mrs. Gummer's spasms became awfully bad and constant.

'What can be expected when the poor dear girls are buried alive at Bow, with their blighted hopes blasted in their tender buds ? What does their father

care? Funerals are performed cheap without feathers and red-nosed mutes. A family grave to hold three is only a matter of a few pounds; and an extra suit of black, which can be inked over when it gets shiny at the seams and knees, and a cloth hat-band, which makes a shabby hat equal to wearing a new one, won't cost a week's income.'

It was the fourth Saturday night after the proposal to leave Bow. Mrs. Gummer had refused to take any grog, and was vigorously clicking her needle against her thimble.

'You need not grudge a piece of calico, for it don't cost a quarter's tobacco, and I make up myself, though the dressing in the stuff that no soap can soften does try the needle. But the poor dear girls shan't go away from a mother's care with empty boxes.'

'The girls going away! Pray, where are they going?'

'Well, I do call that acting surprise. As if you had no hearing, and likewise were eyeless, and didn't know by the letters that have been coming what is going on. No, Gummer, a father may drive his girls to foreign parts, and transportation, if they are not shipwrecked on the sea and are the food of fish without a mother to look after them, for I am not equal to a voyage, but this being a free country, the poor dear girls are not bound to be buried alive at Bow. My girls are going abroad as governesses, and if you did not know it before you know it now.'

'Nonsense! I will not allow it.'

‘Oh, indeed ! But let me tell you, Gummer, that I happen to be the mother of the poor dear girls, and it is not fifty fathers should keep them hidden in a den to nip their prospects for life. This day week they are off, and you ‘will have your Bow, that you are so fond of, to yourself. For, though the same roof covers both of us, it’s not much you will see of Matilda Gummer when her poor dear girls have been meals for sharks, or flung among a parcel of foreigners, to be snapped up by *parlez-vousers*, who don’t know so much English as a Sunday infant-school charity brat.’

That was a crusher. What could I do but give in ! Woman rules, unless she is a fool, or the man is a brute.

Directly I consented to leave Bow, Nancy’s head was well, Janet ceased to be hysterical, and Mrs. Gummer’s spasms only troubled her, as they had done for years, between supper and grog.

When I came home from business on the Monday I saw a bill in the window, notifying that the house was to let.

‘We have lost no time, Gummer, in putting up the “To Let.” We will have the pick of a tenant ; and, moreover, a house that has not lately been done up is seen to advantage when it is furnished.’

CHAPTER VIII.

CORCYRA VILLA.

WHERE should we pitch our tent? I suggested Stratford, but the girls said if they were to remain in the East they might as well stop at Bow. The East-end and the West-end have always been sharp at spiting each other. The West sent her swell criminals to the Tower in the East; tit for tat, the East sent her worst criminals to be hanged at Tyburn in the West. It being determined that we should live in the West, the next day the girls and their ma went to Belgravia by omnibus, with a supply of hard-boiled eggs, biscuits, and antispasms mixture in Matilda's capacious pocket. Even the first night, Mrs. Gummer grumbled about the fatigue and expense.

‘No matter how cheaply you go to work, it is money out of pocket for omnibuses, and the girls could not do without their beer, poor dears, and pastrycooks' bottled pints for sixpence are not half a pint, and the beer warm. Moreover, it wears you out if you have the strength of a waggon-horse. The treadmill, leave alone the disgrace, may be bad—particularly if

there are soft corns and the breath is short—but worse than house-hunting it cannot be. I have had none of it since being married, Gummer, but a feast of it in singlehood. Poor pa was a regular quarterly mover. The fuss, the flurry, the sitting on the stairs whilst waiting for the van, the worry for fear the goods had been stopped, the bread-and-cheeseing and beering the men and the sleeping on the floor agreed with him, though it made him a widower sooner than he would have been if poor dear ma had known a settled home. It would have been a little fortune in poor pa's pocket if he had kept his own van.'

Three days in Belgravia convinced the house-seekers that the neighbourhood would not suit us. The good houses were too dear, and the houses that were not too dear were hovels.

'Seventy, and taxes in proportion, for eight rooms, including a box-room, without a fireplace, and you couldn't swing a kitten, leave alone a grown cat, in the biggest of the rooms. Besides, Gummer, it's no use going anywhere to be looked down upon as if we were fiddling little mice intruding ourselves among live lions, who are proud as cart-horses stuffed with corn.'

We were not busy at the office, and I took a week's holiday to assist in the search. We explored every neighbourhood round London, except those east of the City. We went after advertised houses, which were always totally different from what we expected. A charming villa, standing in its own grounds at Shepherd's Bush, was a tumbledown cottage, sur-

rounded by ten feet of rank grass and flourishing weeds. A delightful cottage near Hendon was a seven-roomed house—or rather seven-celled house—built by contract, the lowest tender being accepted. The doors were warped, the window-frames were very ventilating, the walls were cracked, and the rain had come into the top rooms. We tried advertising. We had shoals of answers, and several disputes about the most likely to look at. We tried a dozen, but not one would suit us. Mrs. Gummer took a consoling view of the position.

‘Well, Tom, if it wasn’t for the teeth in our head, some of them being dentist’s thirds, we might fancy we were born yesterday, and be looking for our long-clothes and soothing syrup. Is it to be expected that a landlord with a house worth the taking, not being a wind and rain sieve or a rent that is a fortune a year, would go to the expense of advertising or answering ours? It’s a sensible fisherman, Tom, who stops at home and expects a fish worth catching to knock at his door and fasten on his hook.

So we returned to the plan of neighbourhood exploring. It was a severe trial of patience. Sometimes we had to walk a mile to get the key, and sometimes the person who showed the house did not know the rent. When a house seemed suitable, the rent was a ridiculous imposition, or else there was a premium, or repairs, or fixtures to be taken at a valuation.

‘Mind you, Gummer, I won’t take to fixtures at a valuation, not even to blinds and gas, which are

rubbish you can't sell again, as poor pa knew to the cost of his poor fleeced family.'



The poverty-stricken women, in dingy, draggling dresses, who had the care of the empties, were irritating and depressing. Here is a specimen of a conversation between one of those creatures and Mrs. Gummer.

Mrs. G.—'Are you sure the house is not damp?'

Person.—'Can't say as how I 'as suffered; though my husband—as is in the Force—is at times that there bad of his limbs as makes regulation boots a 'orrid torture and a hagony to his feet.'

Mrs. G.—'Those marks on the wall look like damp.'

Person.—'The agent do say as how a pipe bust; but in course I can't say, as I ain't seen it busted.'

Mrs. G.—'How long has this house been "to let"?''

Person.—'Not so very long, now, ma'am; but it were last year. Somehow or other, people is always a-coming and a-going.'

Mrs. G.—'Are the taxes heavy?'

Person.—'Can't say, ma'am; but I've heerd that the rates is dreadful.'

Mrs. G.—'Is the landlord willing to do what is required for his tenants?'

Person.—'Of course it aren't for me to say; but of course I don't want to deceive you, ma'am, and I must say as how the landlord is looked upon as an uncommon close-fisted 'un.'

Mrs. Gummer has a double set of wisdom-teeth.

‘Gummer, if my ears are not long they ought to be. If you, being in the wholesale fishmongering line, trusted a barrow full of the finest soles to a fish-hawking body, and told her that she should have all the fish she did not sell, would she cry “Live, oh!”? Is it likely that a person in charge of a comfortable place will be in a hurry to let it, and turn herself out of a rent-free house that suits her? We will have no one in our empty, but leave the key next door, with particulars on a card over the parlour mantelpiece.’

Perhaps I am ill-natured, or else it was only human for me to be glad that Mrs. Gummer and the girls found it difficult to leave dear old Bow. They were nearly exhausted, and began to hint about putting off the move for a year, when Janet took up the advertisement-sheet of the newspaper that I chanced to bring home from the City, and saw that Corcyra Villa, a comfortable residence suitable for a gentleman’s family, and situated in the Green Lanes, was ‘to let.’ The girls thought the name so pretty and so genteel. Mrs. Gummer was certain that the advertisement was a ‘do.’ However, the girls persuaded her to go and look at it, and they looked and were pleased.

Corcyra Villa is a stucco-fronted building, standing in its own grounds—that is to say, about six yards in front, ten behind, and a yard on either side. The portico is large enough for a house five times the size. There are two bells at the gate, one for visitors and

one for servants. The rent is eighty pounds, which is thirty pounds above our limit. This was a fatal objection to Mrs. Gummer, but the girls were in love with the place.

‘My dears,’ said Mrs. Gummer, ‘the rates may be light as the shadow of a feather, and we may do wonders in the way of pinching, but eighty pounds a year going into a landlord’s pocket is what I could not bear, not if your father was behind a bank counter shovelling up gold by bushels, as if he were a dustboy emptying our bin.’

‘But,’ said Nancy, ‘with such sweet, lovely air we shall never want to go to the sea, and that will be a saving.’

‘And then,’ observed Janet, ‘we can grow our own vegetables.’

‘Just hark at them! I do believe, Gummer, that we have all of us chameleons in our eyes, and that things look according to our longings and wishes.’

We offered less rent, and our offer was curtly declined. After three days’ consultation, and getting a letter from the agent for our final answer, as another party was waiting for his final answer, we took Corcyra Villa on a three years’ agreement.

‘Gummer, if, before two quarters of the three years are over, the girls are not off, and keeping their own Corcyras, my judgment is not worth a cracked eyeglass, which, so far as I know, is of no use whatever, except to make one see awry. I look at Corcyra Villa, with its extra rent, as about £90 a year spent over the

poor dear girls for setting them up in the sphere which is the expectation and likewise the duty of the female sex.'

Moving was trouble enough, for, after being over twenty years in a house, there is so much to pack. But the worst trouble began when we took possession of our villa. Our furniture looked so shabby. The Bow blinds were too small. The Bow carpets would only make shift for the bedrooms. The stair-carpets were not half wide enough. The oil-cloth did not nearly cover the hall. In her anger Mrs. Gummer said that the place might go bare before she would spend years of savings for refurnishing; but the girls justly argued that if the house were not properly furnished we might as well have remained at Bow, and that our extra rent would be wasted.

'To be sure, Gummer, what the poor dear girls say might be sworn to without risk of perjury. Talk about the breeding of rabbits in a warren, it is nothing to the breeding of extravagances. If you make up your mind to one extra, a family of extras is certain to follow. A hare at half-a-crown is not very dear eating, but by the time your hare is cooked what with the stuffing and the gravy, and the milk for basting and the jelly, it's twice the price of butchers' meat, and not so filling. What we must do is to fit up for as little as possible, and pull in for the outlay.'

With bargaining, bating down, and contriving, we made Corcyra Villa look furnished for rather less than £200. As soon as the house was in order, the girls

discovered that one servant was vulgar, and that the second servant ought to be a male. At first, Mrs. Gummer agreed with me and opposed the male servant, but the girls persuaded her to try it for six months. If it did not get them a connection they would go back to Bow, and work at something until the expense of the villa had been repaid. So we hired a tall, thin youth, whose mother lived on mangling and the parish. I never saw an uglier or more ungainly boy, but the girls assured me aristocratic pages are always ugly. Mrs. Gummer made him a livery out of my old clothes, profusely trimmed with broad yellow braid and white metal buttons. We had an idea of powdering his hair; but Mrs. Gummer objected, because it would take no end of grease and flour, and she could not bear to waste food.

‘Why, Gummer, keeping that boy’s hair artificial old would take the making of three good pie-crusts a week.’

The wages of our page, two shillings a week, were strictly economical; but his appetite was tremendous.

‘Gummer, growing servants, either boys or girls, would be ruinous dear if they took no wages and paid handsome for their places. They eat equal to the amount of six grown-up wages. But such an eater as James I never fed before, and hope I never may again, at least on this earth, for a wolf after a year’s fast would be a genteel feeder compared to him.’

At the end of the half-year we found that our estimates had been wrong. There was the rent, heavy

rates, and the extra mouth. Moreover, provisions were dearer. Matilda could not go to market late on Saturday nights as she had done at Bow, and pick up food for next to nothing. The bread was fancy-weight. The butcher did not trim his joints, and we were charged for outside fat, skin, and shanks. We had discharged our Bow servant for obvious reasons, and though we had tried four new servants in the six months, the last was no better than the first. She objected to having her dinner cut off the joint in the dining-room. She scorned an allowance of moist sugar. She would not begin her dinner with a suet-dumpling. She claimed the dripping as her perquisite, and insisted on beer twice a day. The tightest pinching could hardly keep the spending at the level of the incoming. At Bow there was no pinching, and money saved. At Corcyra Villa, every sixpence was spent before it was received.

‘ If we will have cream, Gummer, we must pay cream price ; but give me milk, which is more wholesome, besides being cheaper. Do you think, Gummer, I would stand another quarter of this eating your eggs before they are hatched or thought of, if it were not for the sake of the poor dear girls ? For the comfort of it, Gummer, gentility isn’t worth the marrow of a picked bladebone, and it would gobble up a mine of hundred-carat, hall-marked gold before you could think where you are and where you are going. Get the girls settled, Tom, and no more gentility for Matilda Gummer so long as I breathe the air of this mortal world. I feel as if a hundred horse-leeches were fastened on me and

devouring my life's blood faster than my poor heart can make it. Yes, Gummer, gentility is an awful leech that takes all and in return yields nothing but its bite, which is irritating though it is fashionable, and may give the poor dear girls a start. Of course, Tom, if people choose, for the sake of their offspring, to give up comfort and sleep on ticks stuffed with the finest ostrich feathers, which is what gentility comes to, they can't get their beds at goose-feather price.'

CHAPTER IX.

SNUBBED BY THE GENTILITY.

WHEN our Nancy was at school, she had this sentiment for a text-hand copy : ‘Everything is of use ;’ and, being an inquisitive child, she was perpetually puzzling us before other people about the use of the queerest things she could think of.

‘Pa, what is the use of ugly blackbeetles ?’

I leaped that difficulty by replying :

‘My dear child, ugly blackbeetles keep away uglier things.’

‘Then, pa, what is the use of the uglier things ?’

I told her that a little girl should hear, see, and say nothing, and not be asking questions. An inquisitive child is sometimes awfully aggravating.

Once, when Mrs. Gummer was favoured with a visit from quite a lady, who lived at Stratford, Nancy asked her : ‘Ma, what is the use of fleas ?’

Naturally it upset Matilda ; but, like the boy in ‘Mangnall’s Greece,’ who looked calm as a picture-saint whilst a stolen fox was eating his inside, she did not show her state of topsy-turvy, but replied :

‘My dear, fleas are sent to make lazy people wash under the beds every day in summer, and once a week in winter.’

Sometimes the questions would try the patience of Mrs. Gummer. Here is a specimen :

Janet.—‘Ma, what is the use of mice?’

Ma.—‘To be the prey of cats.’

Janet.—‘What is the use of cats?’

Ma.—‘To catch the mice.’

Janet.—‘Yes, ma, but if there were no mice there would be no need of cats.’

Ma.—‘My dear, what would become of dead horses and cats’-meat men?’

Janet.—‘But could they not bury the horses, and then we could spend the cats’-meat money in sweets?’

Ma.—‘Janet, my head aches, and you must let me have a moment’s rest.’

I have met with persons who considered things useless because they did not know their use.

What is the use of City companies? ‘They do nothing but gorge,’ says the reformer, who hates anybody to have any enjoyment. Now, I happen to know that City companies are schools of useful knowledge. They educate the palate. A client of ours invited me to the Bowyers’ feed, or I should have been ignorant of the taste of real turtle. No matter whether my uneducated stomach and my untaught palate shied at the lumps of green fat, or whether the turtle and the iced punch obliged me to physic on Saturday night. What I say is, that if Tyler or Cromwell had put down the

City companies, the taste of real turtle would have been a stranger to my palate. Take the case of pine-apple. I had bought West Indians, which looked real, and which ate like a mash of apple and pear gone measly, and sweetened with strong molasses. Until I dined with the Bowyers, I had no idea of the flavour of a genuine British hothouse-pine. It was not like what I thought it would be like ; but that is life. We very seldom get what we expect, and when we do it is not like what we expected it would be like. To avoid being disappointed, never expect anything, and make up your mind that what you get will be unlike your anticipations. This may sound nonsensical, but it is the truth.

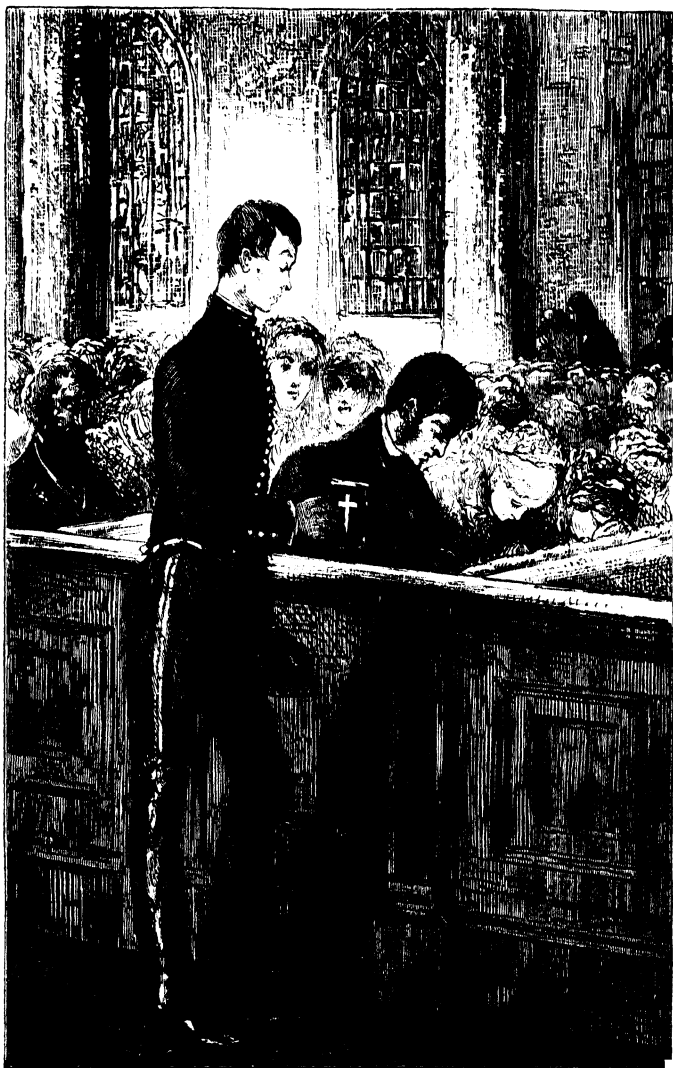
It was our experience at Corcyra Villa. The girls were no nearer offers than they would have been if we had remained at Bow, or moved to Houndsditch. We were not exactly cold-shouldered. It was worse than that, for we were not shouldered at all. If we had been immigrant sparrows we should have been as much noticed. Yet we did not shirk observation. Twice a week Mrs. Gummer and the girls had a drive in an open carriage, at three-and-sixpence the first hour, and half-a-crown the second, and a shilling for the coachman. The drive was really not much over the hour, for the carriage was kept waiting for the ladies. It had no more effect than if we had put a perambulator outside the door. Our garden was laid out at a cost of seven pounds ten shillings, including a small lawn in front of the house. There the girls, charmingly dressed,

with Matilda in a rich satin trailing on the grass, promenaded in the summer evenings, but, except a few beggars, and vulgar 'persons from town taking a walk in the Green Lanes, no one looked at them.

At church, where we had a pew in the middle aisle handsomely fitted up, the cushions being covered with quilted satin by Mrs. Gummer, one or two people gave us a glance, which seemed to say, 'What you Gummers are we don't know, and we don't care. You may be good sort of creatures, but you do not belong to our species.' The first time that James, our page, his buttons rubbed with plate polish, and shining like silver, followed us up the aisle, stood by the pew-door whilst we were supposed to be saying our private prayers, and then handed us the books before he went to a free seat, some of the Green Laners sneered, and that was the only notice taken of us at church.

We did our best to get into society, but, as Mrs. Gummer said, we might as well have sowed mustard and cress on a sheet of ice and looked for a small salad. There was a bazaar for the benefit of the schools. The girls wrote to the rector's wife, offering to contribute and to take stalls. The answer was that donations would be thankfully received, but the stalls were full.

'Then we don't contribute so much as a pen-wiper made out of a bit of old cloth and an eighth of shilling flannel. If Gummer flesh and blood ain't good enough to mix with, Gummer money ain't good enough to pocket.'



James, our page, his buttons rubbed with plate-polish, and shining like silver,
followed us up the aisle.

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Mrs. Gummer stopped the single curate in the street and asked him to call at Corcyra Villa, telling him that we always expected a visit from the clergy, seeing that we rented a whole pew and never passed the plate. The curate called, sipped a glass of wine, looked at the girls sweetly through his eye-glass, talked about the weather, and then gave Mrs. Gummer and the girls a knock-down blow by asking them where we came from. Janet felt herself turn pale, and Nancy felt her face turn red. But Mrs. Gummer is a wonderfully ready woman, and replied that, having some property near Stratford, we had lived there for the benefit of the air which suited the family.

‘Yes, to be sure; I remember,’ said the curate.

When I came home that evening, Janet was in bed with a bad headache. Mrs. Gummer was on



the sofa with spasms. Nancy was exhorting her ma to take something out of a tumbler. When I asked if anything had happened, the reply was: ‘Oh, nothing!’ And when I said I was sure that something had vexed them, Matilda reproached me for always upbraiding her for being unwell. Presently I was told about the visit of the curate.

‘Yes, of course he remembers,’ said Mrs. Gummer. ‘Thanks to a father who is always so taken up with his Purrem and Mangles, and other things out of doors, that he has not a thought for his poor dear girls, the curate and all the Green Laners know and remember that the Gummers came from Bow. Didn’t you hire a Bow van to bring the furniture, and don’t van men frequent the nearest public for their beer, and don’t they talk about their job? Get into society, indeed! You might as well have chalked “Bow” on the backs of the poor, dear, scorned girls.’

We are a persevering family, and it was determined to cultivate the acquaintance of the curate, despite his unfortunate remembrance. Nancy worked him a pair of slippers, and I suggested that they should be made up.

‘Your grandfather, who was in the line, used to say that it was no kindness to give worked slippers unless ready for wear, because the shoemaker charges twice as much for making up ladies’ work as he does for a pair of the finest slippers.’

‘A wife-beater and a family-deserter you are not, Gummer; but torturing me and the poor dear girls until we are mortified from the tops of our heads to the soles of our unhappy feet is more cruel. How are we to get on if we are for ever to be shackled with Bow? And not only with our private house, but also with your Golden Boot. If we were intended to be always looking back our eyes would be behind, and not in front. And, moreover, are we to suppose that

a curate grudges the making up of work given by a young lady? And how are we to know the size of his foot? Our girls were not brought up at a Golden Boot, so that they can take the measure of a curate's foot with their eyes.'

Nevertheless, it was finally agreed that the slippers should be sent ready for wear. The girls went to a shoemaker in the neighbourhood, who said he knew the fit of the rev. gentleman, as he had made up several pairs of slippers for him. When Matilda heard this she was disgusted at the forwardness of creatures, who had no pretensions, forcing their slippers on a curate; but she was sure that they were a set of old cats that no man would look at a second time. The making up cost twelve shillings and sixpence. The slippers were wrapped up in a sheet of delicately-tinted paper, and sent, with a note from Nancy, in which she expressed, in scented ink, a hope that the Rev. Mr. Herring would be blessed with health and happiness to enjoy them. Next morning at church we fully expected some acknowledgment. Nancy blushed when the curate faced us to read the first lesson, Janet dropped her Church Service, and Mrs. Gummer muttered 'Quite welcome.'

The curate did not once look at our pew. After the service, we lingered about the church porch until he came out. To our annoyance he merely bowed and passed on. Mrs. Gummer wanted to stop him and ask him if the slippers were a fit, but the girls objected, Janet suggesting that perhaps the curate

wanted to say more in a letter than he could do in the street.

When we got home the page was severely examined and cross-examined as to whether the parcel had been left at the right house. Next day came a formal note of thanks, and that was the only return for a pair of worked slippers that cost twelve-and-sixpence to make up. Though discouraged we did not despair. Perhaps the other daughter had taken his fancy. Thereupon, Janet worked a pair of braces so beautifully that it seemed a shame to hide them with coat and waistcoat, and Matilda said they ought to be worn outside, like bishops lawn shirt-sleeves. Janet's gift had no more effect than Nancy's, and Mrs. Gummer was so incensed that she threatened to leave the church.

The curate having failed we tried the doctor. Mrs. Gummer remarked that Dr. Bungay attended all the best families in the neighbourhood, and added that a family doctor was a better introducer than a curate. Soon afterwards her spasms became very bad, and the girls had distressing nervous headaches. Dr. Bungay was sent for. He was kind and attentive, and sent in palatable physic at three-and-sixpence per quartern, including glass. Although Mrs. Gummer always asked after Mrs. Bungay, the doctor did not suggest a call. Mrs. Gummer told him that the girls missed their old friends and wanted some acquaintances in the neighbourhood. The doctor merely advised her to invite the old friends.

'Well, Gummer,' said Matilda, 'if a horse is led to

the finest spring-water that was ever tasted and he won't drink, but prefers brackish water out of a hall-marked pail, that horse is a fool, and it is no shame to the spring-water which don't care about being scorned instead of being drunk. But we are not water, and we have feelings, and it is trying to come into what is reckoned a genteel neighbourhood, at an awful outlay, and then to be looked down upon by a set of crane-necked paupers. For my part, Gummer, I hate the paltry hole, with its turned-up nose, make-believe fry.'

The next move, or rather attempted move, was a bad one for me, because it caused a week of domestic jarring.

'Tom,' said Matilda, 'I blame myself for keeping you so long at Bow. It was a millstone round your neck, and loaded in that way how could you or any other man swim for his family?'

I was alarmed, for I knew from experience that when Matilda called me Tom, and talked about blaming herself, that something was about to be proposed to which I should object. I replied that Bow had not interfered with my progress in life, and I added that I thought, on the whole, I had done pretty well. When a man is too old to start afresh he does not like to be told that his career has been a failure.

'And who said that you had not done pretty well? It's pretty well in these days to get your bread and plenty of it, but it is likewise a pity that you had a chance of getting plenty of cheese to your bread and missed it. How could you make a connection at Bow?

How could you ask your Purrems and your Mangles, and their wives, and first-class clients and their wives, and young barristers, and maybe judges, to a party at Bow? If you had been living where you could have done it, you would have been a head partner, and who can tell what besides? Giving parties is the secret of people getting on. As poor dear ma used to say to poor pa, "Why don't you invite, and give wine, which opens the purse?" But it's no use blaming poor pa now he is gone, for he never had credit with a wine merchant, and he never knew anyone who had a purse worth opening with a thimbleful of stale porter.'

'Never mind, Matilda; let us be content and thankful.'

'That's what poor pa used to try poor dear ma with, and that sort of preaching is a flimsy cloak for doing as little as the parish allows for those who have a right to call you father. I hate your shaft-horses, which, though they do most of the pulling for other people, have not the spirit to lead a team for themselves, which was poor dear pa's fate, who, with his talent, might have been anything he aimed at. But there, Tom, we won't quarrel, for it's more my fault than yours. If a wife isn't a save-all the husband will never be worth a pound that he does not owe twice over, and if a wife is not a spurrier a husband will never make a move in the world. A save-all I have been, but I have never been a spurrier, and that is why we are a shaft-horse instead of being an outrider, with nothing to do but be looked at and admired. But

because we ~~did~~ not pick up our pine-apple yesterday, it does not follow that we should pass our fruit to-day.'

'Of course not, Matilda, and we will do our best. Let us have our grog and our game of cribbage.'

'It's not grog or crib that I can enjoy with my heart choking me in my throat about the future of the poor dear girls. Gummer, it's time we made an effort, and what we are going to do we ought to do at once without waiting for our hay to be grown ready made, which is what don't happen every day. There must be a week's notice, for, as Janet says, less than a week is vulgar. But printed invites, which can be bought at the stationer's, with the names filled in by the girls, might be sent out to-morrow. And trust us, Tom, for providing a supper, wine included—for genteel people are not swillers when they go out—at under five shillings a head, that your West-end pastrycook would call cheap at a guinea. If I don't, set me down for a fool, which you are not likely after knowing all these years what I can do with a shilling. So, Tom, just make out the list.'

'List! What do you mean?'

'Don't be provoking, Tom, for if you can't understand English I can't tell you in Dutch, which may be a plainer language, but it was not taught at any of the schools I went to and left, and they were a good few, seeing that poor pa was always behind at the end of the quarter, besides changing his neighbourhood. Well, Tom, we have made up our minds to have a

party, with quadrilles at ten, and a professional female at the piano for half-a-guinea and her refreshments. We shall ask Dr. Bungay and his wife to meet a few friends, and depend upon it, Gummer, they will not offend a customer who pays, which all doctors' customers do not. Also, we shall ask the curate, and we shall not turn our eyes into fire-plugs if he is too proud to meet those who might start him with a living. And now, Tom, who shall we ask on your side ?

'Who do I know ? The idea is absurd. To be sure, there is Stubbs, our Chancery clerk——'

'Stubbs !' exclaimed Matilda.

The girls who I suppose had been listening to the conversation, came into the room.

'Stubbs, pa !' said Nancy.

'Stubbs, indeed !' said Janet.

'My dears, your pa is only joking, and he wouldn't if he knew how he wrung our feelings, for our feelings are not clothes out of the wash tub. No, Tom, we are no longer Bowers, and where we now live is high enough for anyone to visit. Only yesterday there was a carriage-and-pair next door but one, with as fat a coachman as ever drove, a six-feeter in silk calves behind, and a painting on the door of the owner's arms, being wild animals stretching on their hind legs. And Corcyra Villa has as many rooms, is as high rented, and better gardened than Mesopotamia Lodge.'

'But I don't know anybody you care to have here.'

'And you never will know anybody worth salting. You stick to your Stubbses as if they were warts born

on your fingers, that acids won't get rid of. Why should we not ask Mr. and Mrs. Purrem, and Mr. and Mrs. Mangles, and the young Purrems, and the young Mangles? Also three or four of your clients? There's Sir Samuel Dobbin, whom you are taking through the Divorce Court, and do you think he won't jump at society? and, time after time, you have said that before a man is free from one twain-half his eye is fixing on another. Also, there is your junior counsel, who are so polite to you, well knowing that it is not the firm but the manager who sends them briefs, which is their bread. Who do you know? If you choose to invite those you do know we shall have a party that will make the conceited Green Laners, who fancy they are treble X, feel as small as ninepenny gallon table-beer. But if their own fathers will not launch the poor dear girls, they must stick on the stocks to the end of their days. Even gold-fish can't put themselves into their native element.'

I could not agree to the proposal, and for a week I was so miserable that once I thought of a mysterious disappearance and going to live in a quiet lodging under a new name. And when Matilda and the girls came round there was no peace because we could not get into society. I am a loyal subject, but I believe at that time I should have joined a Red Republican revolution for making everybody equal and one person as good as another, and better, too.

'Gummer,' said Matilda, 'equality is not human nature. If those who talk about it got their equality,

they would be the first to try to stand on the heads of their equals. Those who are at the bottom want to pull others down for the sake of a chance of getting to the top, and I don't blame them, for it's nature. As poor dear pa used to say about politics, laws and government are only like hens, and can only hatch the eggs they have to sit on, and can't hatch ducks out of fowls' eggs, or eagles out of ducks' eggs. And the eggs being different, the broods can't be of the same sort and equals. But, Tom, it is nettlerash to the temper for fowls to be cut by their fellow-birds, which being the same sort are not their superiors in singing, or feathering, or flying.'

CHAPTER X.

GENTILITY DOES NOT PAY.

AT the Green Lanes we did what we had never done at Bow. We had account-books. I mean those little penny books with which tradesmen supply their trusted customers. At first Mrs. Gummer stuck to the old plan of not owing a penny, but the tradesmen said they preferred accounts; the girls decided that it was vulgar to order at the shop and to pay at the door; and so, very reluctantly, we adopted the credit system. Not that our credit was considerable, for if we went over the quarter with the butcher, or the month with the milkman, we were politely asked to settle. On a settling-day, about a year after we had been in the Green Lanes, we made an alarming discovery. We had been out-living, and were out-living the income. The villa cost more than we calculated, in the way of rates and taxes. I was obliged to be nearer the mark in my income-tax return. Provisions were dearer in the Green Lanes than at Bow. The girls spent more in dress, because they would not be behind the Green Lanes style. They no longer

trimmed their bonnets or made their dresses, because anybody can see when things are home-made. But it would take a volume to put down all our little extras.

‘Gummer, this won’t do, and shan’t go on. Living up to the shadow of one’s last farthing is what I will not be guilty of; and when you come to going beyond it, I would as kindly take to burglary, which is more honest, for your burglar does give one a chance of locking up against him, but your over-income liver gets your goods by first throwing dust in your eyes. And it’s no use blaming a tradesman for being deceived by appearances, for there is nothing but appearances to guide us in this world, seeing that thought and feelings are covered with flesh, and flesh can’t be seen through by eyes of the same material. Gummer, we will not be a throw-dust-in-your-eye pickpocket, and consequently we must make a change, for though we have a something to draw at, the something is not a fountain of bank-notes and sovereigns, and the drawing at it must come to an end. And, Gummer, the sooner we stop drifting to the parish allowance, which only keeps body and soul together, without making either of them good or happy, the better and safer it will be. For though they say that you may see mushrooms growing if you look at them through a microscope, I tell you, Gummer that mushrooms are slow growers in comparison with savings or debts. Put by ever so little regularly, and you wake up some day, as we did, Tom, and have the pleasure of

feeling that you are a person of property. Owe a trifle, as poor pa always did, and before you can turn your head the duns have you by the ears and executions reduce you to bare boards. I see nothing but going back to Bow, where you are not robbed under your nose, where you can see a joint trimmed and weighed, and where all things are not at a price that means work-house ruin. It may be a bitter pill to the poor dear girls, but it would be a bitterer pill, and also the most awful black-draught to follow in the morning, if it came to their pa being brokered, and a stair-carpet hung out of the window, with a bill on it, telling the neighbours we were come to the hammer and were being sold up to the highest bidder. Gummer, I know what it is to have your feather bed took from under you, and, though I was a girl at the time, I shall never forget it. Gummer, living beyond your income is flinging open the door to a distress.'

Matilda always was a long speech-maker, and, when she starts one, nothing can stop her; but I think I never heard her make so long a speech as that of which I have just given an outline. She was exhausted by it.

'Tom,' she said, 'though I hate spirits by daylight, which has been the downfall of thousands, I am so done up that I must take a sip. But, if it comes to not being able to afford them, I could give up spirits by night, though they are my second nature, and take to nightmares regularly without a murmur.'

A few days afterwards we received a hamper by

dark, I say that you and Nancy talk like young bears who haven't cut their milk teeth. You might stitch from morning to night, and the two of you would not earn a pound a week. I had the pick of work in my time, being a first hand at waistcoats, and I never cleared over my one-pound-four a week. And waistcoats, not slop, but orders, are trying work, I can tell you; and though I was strong then, and was not one to give up, it acted upon my constitution like moth in a fur, and it was seen when I had the least shake, even a common cold. Besides the stitching, which must be to the thread, and the stretching to make the waistcoat set, (and when men talk of women being particular about their figures, it's a case of fish abusing other fish for being fishy), there was the ironing. So far as shirts, and even muslin dresses with flounces, go, I could iron to this day, even under a July sun that blistered the street-door paint; but pressing with a hot goose is a weakener that would make an elephant pant for steel mixture.'

'If you could let two or three rooms and live rent free, we might stop here,' I remarked.

'The idea of lodgers!' said Janet. 'You know, pa, it would be known all over the neighbourhood.'

'Lodgers!' exclaimed Mrs. Gummer. 'Well, what is coming to me. Here have I been thinking of every thing but the right thing, and never should have thought of it if pa had not talked of lodgers. But it is not lodgers in my mind. Not that I despise lodgers, but they are not genteel; and if we can hold

up our heads without going behind and behind until the parish loaf stares us in the face, I would lie on a bed of unticked stinging-nettles to do it, for the sake of the poor, dear girls, although they are pert to their mother because she won't shut her eyes to what must come if we keep on going backwards from mud to mire.'

'How cross you are, ma!' said Nancy.

'Never mind about being cross—though, when you come to my years, the man who has you for better or worse may fancy your temper has gone more to the worse than to the better. But if I am cross, perhaps I had better keep my plan to myself.'

'Come, Matilda, what is it?'

'What is it, Gummer? Why, what do you suppose it is but one or two gentlemen to partial board? That is genteel, and it will more than make our takings-in equal to our goings-out. Moreover, Tom, partial board in a genteel family gets off more girls than all your balls, parties, and theatres put together. In our part of Islington the number of girls who married partial boarders must have been a fortune to the party who let out the wedding carriages. Most of the young men were Germans, and I don't fancy different countries living under the same roof; but if a girl must take to a foreigner, there is nothing equal to a German, who is sure to get on in this country. But it is not always foreigners, for Martha Spriggs, who was nearly thirty, and a beak-nosed scrag, got hold of a carriage and a thousand a year through partial board, and her catch was an Englishman.'

The girls approved of the partial-board plan, and next morning, at breakfast, Nancy read an advertisement which she and Janet had composed, with the help of their mamma :

“‘TO GENTLEMEN.—A professional, musical, and cheerful family, residing in a villa standing in its own grounds, in the most beautiful, salubrious, and genteel suburb of the metropolis, and conveniently accessible to the City, having a larger house than they require, and seeking society of refined taste and position, are willing to receive one or two gentlemen to partial board, on nominal terms. The dinner-hour is 8.30 p.m. The highest references given and required.—Address ‘Professional,’ at Mutton’s Library.”’

‘There, pa, is not that capital?’ asked Janet.

‘Who are our high references?’

‘Lor, pa—that is only a form.’

‘The nominal terms will be thought to mean next to nothing.’

‘And, Gummer, what is three pounds a week, with washing extra, to a gentleman who is one, and not a false, pretending pauper, in a white shirt and kid gloves?’

‘If you find gentlemen who look upon three pounds a week for two meals a day and a bedroom nominal terms, there is more money or bigger fools in the world than I supposed.’

‘Well, pa, there is no harm in getting the most we can, and if three pounds is too high, we can ask for less if the applicants object.’

‘It’s just like your pa. For years I have been persuading him to ask for more at the office, and when he

did he named an extra pound a week. Of course they gave it him, and they would have given him an extra five pounds a week, if he had not been afraid to open his mouth. The wider you open the mouth, the more flies are caught.'

'And an half-past eight o'clock dinner! Why, they will expect two or three courses.'

'Pray, Gummer, am I not good at fiddle-faddle make-ups? I can give them their two courses, and sometimes their three courses, for what some women would spend for your plain joint without a second vegetable.'

'Anyhow,' said I, getting rather peevish, 'we are not a professional family. I am not admitted.'

'And who ever said you were admitted? But you are in the profession, and partial boarders, unless they are detectives, who are not likely to be at home in the Green Lanes, will not trouble themselves about your being admitted. And is it the fault of the poor, dear girls that they have a father who doesn't insist upon his articles, and being in the firm? But go on and grumble at something else in our advertisement, that any other father would be proud of. Grumble! you are always at it. I do believe you will find fault with your coffin, though you are put into the best that money can buy. Moreover, it is so nice of a father to be for ever pouring buckets of black-frost ice-water down the backs of the poor, dear girls. No, my dears. Put in that your father is a costermonger on the sly

and your mother a private mangler, and your pa will be happy.'

'Yes, ma,' said Janet: 'and let us put in that we are poor, and take in boarders for the sake of their paltry money.'

'Pa, you will drive us into service,' said Nancy.

'Let the advertisement go as it is. I only spoke by way of argument.'

May be I am henpecked. Perhaps men who are lords at home would stop their crowing if they knew what was thought of them before their faces and done behind their backs. It is better to be henpecked than hated and humbugged; and every married man is one or the other.

I was stirring my last cup of tea. Mrs. Gummer, after dropping a piece of soda in the pot, was filling it up for the servants. Ring, ding, dong, dong, dong. Corecra Villa has the loudest bell in the county; and postmen are friendly to bell-hangers. In a minute, James brought in the letter-bag.

We did what we could to act up to a detached villa.



When we were at Bow we behaved according to the neighbourhood, and the girls rushed to the door to seize the letters. But that conduct would have been a kind of social felony in the Green Lanes. So we waited whilst James studied

the addresses and put the letters into the bag. The girls had read many fashionable novels, and thus

learnt the habits and manners of the aristocracy. In high-life novels, the authors always talk of the letter-bag being brought in at breakfast; and we determined to have a letter-bag. We did not know where to buy one; and unfortunately such important things are not illustrated in aristocratic novels as they ought to be. But Mrs. Gummer is equal to any difficulty. She bought two yards of stout holland, and made a small-sized clothes-bag. The girls worked on it, in red wool, the letters 'Letter-bag,' and it was fastened at the top by a yard of blue blind-cord. I merely mention this to show that, though Green Lanes' gentility snubbed us, we deserved kinder treatment. The gallery always stamp their feet and warm their hands when the leading tragedy says it is better to deserve success than to command it. It is not my experience or philosophy. May be that I am wrong, but this is how I put it. It is not chance, but Providence, that governs affairs; and Providence, I take it, is too fair to favour anybody. What then? Everybody gets his deserts; and he who fails does not deserve success, and he who commands success deserves it. There is a world of misfortune seen in a lawyer's office, and I never met with a client going or gone to the bad who did not think himself unlucky; but when we look into affairs we find he has been sowing troubles broadcast. Not to get what you want is bad enough, but to fancy that you deserve what you want and don't get, as most of us do, is self-aggravation.

Mrs. Gummer does not agree with me as to the

self-aggravation. She says that grumblers are persons who enjoy a good opinion of themselves, because they put all their faults and misfortunes on Providence.

‘As poor dear pa used to say, this is a world of spiders and flies, and though the spiders get fat upon the flies they catch, if a fly is careful and keeps his eyes open, and don’t go into a web, who would not rather be a fly than a spider? And as for making a name, he used to say the world is full of hard facts which are brick walls, and soft facts which are clay. If a man runs his head against soft clay, he makes his impression on it, which is fame. But because a man don’t come across soft clay, it is no reason why he should run his head against hard facts, which are brick walls, and make their impression on him, which is not fame, but folly. Ah, pa was a wonderful proverber, though he did not do what he advised. As he used to say, poor dear, when he was mellowed by his glass of spirits, “Mat, my beloved daughter, your pa is a sign-post fixed by cruel fate in the midst of a swamp; but he is an illuminated sign-post that nobly serves his heartless day and his ungrateful generation by pointing out the right road to others.”’

CHAPTER XI.

THE STUPENDOUS SURPRISE.

I HAD finished stirring, and was sipping, my last cup of tea ; Mrs. Gummer was shaking the teapot, to help the action of the soda, for if the tea was not black our domestic refused to drink it ; the girls were talking about a thin young man, who dressed so nicely, and always looked at Corcyra Villa when he passed. As Matilda often remarked afterwards, there we sat quietly, like daisies vegetating on a bursting volcano, as if nothing was about to happen, and James calmly brought in the letter-bag. I finished the cup of tea, and then opened the bag rather hastily, for we had been longer than usual over breakfast, and Purrem and Mangles' is a punctual office.

‘Lor, pa, what a big letter ! Who can it be from ?’ asked Janet, as I took out a large-sized blue-wave envelope, addressed, ‘Thomas Gummer, Esq.,’ etc., etc., etc.

‘It looks like a Queen’s Service,’ said Matilda. ‘They often came to poor pa, but we are not behind with our taxes.’

‘It’s patterns from a selling-off shop,’ said Janet.

‘Perhaps they are getting up another bazaar, but we will not give to other people’s stalls,’ said Nancy.

‘Nothing of the sort,’ said I ; ‘it’s a lawyer’s letter. What can be the matter ?’

‘Maybe our wicked runaway tenant wants to compromise ; but I won’t do it with a flitter who lets the water be cut off,’ said Mrs. Gummer.

‘Not impossible,’ I observed, as I was opening the letter.

‘Or,’ remarked Mrs. Gummer, ‘it is not a mile from a likely guess that some firm is offering you terms equal to your merits, and which you are never likely to get from those slave-grinding grabbers, Purrem and Mangles.’

I opened the letter, and read it. Then I stared at it. Then the letter seemed to stare at me. Then I tried to read it again. Then the letters turned different colours, and the lines danced a drunken jig. If I had swallowed a nest-egg I could not have had a more choking lump in my throat.

Mrs. Gummer and the girls were scared.

‘Oh, Gummer !—my dear Tom, if the bank has broke, and we are drove to out-door relief and a back attic, with straw for our bed, your dying in the very eyes of your family won’t bring back the money that has gone. Tom, dear, don’t, don’t, don’t take on.’

‘Pa,’ exclaimed Nancy, ‘tell us the worst. Oh, do, do, do !’

‘Send for Dr. Bungay,’ cried Janet.



I opened the letter, and read it. Then I stared at it. . . . Mrs. Gummer and the girls were scared.

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‘My cousin in India is dead,’ I gasped out, as well as the nest-egg would let me.

‘Gummer, the cat might blush to call you her master. Frightening your poor, persecuted family into killing-fits, and a doctor’s bill to beggar us ! And what for ? Feelings are feelings ; but what is Joseph Gummer to you and to yours, that we are to be upset about him in a way that we shall not be right again for weeks ? It’s fifteen years good and more since he has seen us, when he gave Nancy a silver mug, and a fal-de-ral knife and fork to Janet. And are you to rave worse than a delirium tremens’d Marched hare because he is dead ?’

‘My dear,’ said I, ‘poor Joseph has ——’

But I could not go on, for the nest-egg was bigger than ever.

‘Well, Gummer, I won’t be hard on your feelings for your own flesh and blood, and, of course, the flesh of your father’s brother does belong to you ; and, of course, Tom, it’s awful to be tomahawked by Indians in paint and feathers ; but it does not follow that a respectable father is to kill himself and his poor, dear family with the horrors, because his father’s mother happened to be the murdered victim’s grandmother. As far as affection goes, compared to a man’s own wife and offspring, a cousin is no nearer related to you than Jack the Giant Killer, or Aladdin’s Lamp. Moreover, people should stop in the land they are born to, and not go poking their noses amongst the Indians, to whom tomahawking is natural.’

I swallowed a glass of water that Nancy gave me, and then read the letter, as well as the nest-egg in my throat would allow of :

‘ Bedford Row, April 30, 18—.

‘ THOMAS GUMMER, ESQ., etc., etc., etc.

‘ SIR,—It is our pleasure to inform you that by the last Indian mail, we were favoured with a letter from Messrs. Leopard and Co., solicitors, of Calcutta—we being their London agents—in which we are instructed to communicate to you important intelligence. A delay has occurred in consequence of your change of residence. We have to inform you that Mr. Joseph Gummer, merchant, of Calcutta, died on the first day of the year, and that by his will he has left you the whole of his property. It is our further pleasure to inform you that Messrs. Leopard and Co., who were the professional advisers of your late lamented cousin, estimate the value of the property at £40,000. Perhaps you will favour us with an early call. Whilst condoling with you on the decease of your esteemed relative, we sincerely congratulate you on the excellent and just disposition of his property ; and awaiting your instructions, we are, dear sir, your faithful servants,

‘ SPARKES AND SON.’

The letter fluttered to the table, and there was a silence of perhaps a minute, but it seemed an hour, a day, a month. In that minute a whole lifetime—a score of lifetimes—were acted in my mind. I thought of what my mother would have said if she had known

that I was coming into such a fortune. I thought of the astonishment of Purrem and Mangles, and the envy of my fellow-clerks, and how they would want to borrow. I thought of buying an estate, and whether I would take to farming. I thought of being a magistrate, and a member of Parliament. I thought of going to the bar, in spite of my years, and dying on the woolsack. I thought of how I should invest my money, and I was bothered between the choice of bad securities or low interest. I thought of how much Mrs. Gummer and the girls would want for dress, and how much I should have to pay in charity. I thought about making my will, and I wished the fortune had come to me when I was younger. I thought of what I should have done if I had come into the money when I was twenty-one. I should have doubled it by careful investment. I should have been a great man in society. But it came too late to give me pleasure, and the moment it arrived I had to think about making my will. All these things, and more than I can now remember, passed through my mind in the minute.

The spell of silence was broken by Mrs. Gummer and the girls crying together. Matilda got off her chair and kissed me.

‘Oh, Gummer—bless you, dear! Tom, this is the pouring rain I dreamt of, but could not make out; and our girls will be the equals of the highest flyers in the land. Tom, the room is going round so dreadful, and I can’t stand.’

Matilda was very bad. I soused her with vinegar

and water externally, and with brandy-and-water internally. When she came to, the girls were worse, and hysterics, which is the most provoking complaint I know of, lasted for nearly half an hour.

I read the letter over again.

‘Surely,’ said I, ‘it can’t be a hoax?’

Nancy bellowed, Janet screamed, and Mrs. Gummer sprang from the sofa in the fiercest rage I have ever seen her in during a quarter of a century of married life, by which husbands will understand it must have been a tearing passion.

‘Gummer, don’t make me curse you and hate you! How dare you fly in the face of Providence? How dare you blast the promise of a fortune put within your very grasp? I do believe, if you had a mine of diamonds, you would never rest until you had turned every diamond into false jewellery not worth a shilling a ton. But you have always been and always will be wringing wet blankets on the rising hopes of your poor, defrauded family. But never mind—when you have brought us to our end you will be sorry for it, and all your money won’t bring us back again.’

‘My dear Matilda, I only suggested. I’ll be off to Sparkes and Son at once.’

‘And, Gummer, don’t be fooled and fiddled; and don’t let the poor, dear girls be robbed before your wide-open eyes. If anything goes wrong with the fortune, mind you, Gummer, I would rather have followed the poor dears to their infant graves before ever they opened their eyes in this cheating world.’

‘Go with him, ma,’ said Nancy. ‘Pa is too flurried to be safe.’

‘Pray do,’ said Janet; ‘for if the fortune don’t come, I hope I shall die.’

‘My dears, I don’t feel equal to putting one leg before the other; and if I did, I don’t believe the other would follow; but, for the sake of my family, I would try to walk on a greasy tight-rope though the first step was sure to be my last on earth. But, my dears, I am in that state that I feel as if I must scream. My poor head is turned into a roundabout that is going round reverse ways at the same time. Pinch me, my dears, or I shall go mad. Oh, Tom, to think of a fortune that puts these turn-up nose Green-Laners under the very soles of our feet. But, Tom, be on your guard, for I am not equal to being your seconder.’

‘But you must go, ma,’ said Janet.

‘The change will do you good,’ said Nancy.

‘And if I do, my dears, what will the lawyers think of seeing me? For, as my poor pa used to say, when they asked for costs which they did not get unless they came out of the seized furniture, they can see through a brick wall without spectacles, if there is six-and-eight behind it. Would they take your pa for a party not to be trusted by himself? Or would the two of us agoing together look like being knocked aback at the news and half thinking it might not be true?’

After a short debate it was decided that Mrs. Gummer should go with me to the lawyers’.

‘You see, pa,’ said Janet, ‘ma will be a witness for you.’

‘My dear,’ I replied, ‘a wife cannot be a witness for her husband in a criminal matter, and I apprehend that any improper conduct of Messrs. Sparkes and Son in respect to the said fortune will be a criminal matter.’

‘That may be the law, Tom, and the more I hear of the law the more glad I am that the law is not the gospel, for then it would be a poor chance for most of us, not only here but also hereafter. But if I am not your witness I can be your backer, and I will take care that, as you are not witnessed, the lawyers shan’t have a witness to swear that you swore you are not your cousin’s cousin, but some other party.’

Before Mrs. Gummer could prepare for the journey she was obliged to have a double dose of her usual anti-spasm mixture.

‘Ah, Tom, when it comes to morning spirits it is a black-crape look-out, except for a party who happens to have a policy on your life, and who naturally wishes you were funeraled. But that is not my case, for hot spirits in the morning is what I have not touched since we had the house painted inside, after Janet was born, and the smell of the paint got on my poor weak stomach.’

‘Really, ma, you should dress and be off,’ said Janet.

The girls were not long in completing their mother’s toilet. They insisted that the morning dress was good enough to go to an office in the forenoon, for

Mrs. Faddle had told them that the Duchess of S—— always wore stuffs until the afternoon. They fastened a shawl round her throat, tied on her bonnet, smoothed her front hair, and laced up her boots. The gloves would not go on—kids never will when one is in a hurry—so they were to be coaxed on whilst we were walking to a cab, which Janet besought us to take, because it was faster than an omnibus.

‘Gummer, before we start, let me beg of you not to throw oceans of cold water on the fortune before the lawyers, who would be rogues enough to pretend you were the wrong Gummer, or, may be, not a Gummer. Then the fortune might be swindled into Chancery; and, as you have times out of number told me, Chancery is like a cow with a big swallow, but never vomits. And, Gummer, don’t look in the least surprised, but seem as if you knew that poor Joseph was going to be tomahawked, and to leave you his fortune.’

Amidst a confused chorus of blessings and cautions we left the house. The morning was cloudy, and having forgotten the umbrella, I was turning back for it, when the girls set up a shriek that brought me to a sudden stop.

‘Oh, pa, pa—pray don’t come back, it’s so horribly unlucky!’ And Janet, forgetting all about the gentility of the Green Lanes, ran into the road with the umbrella.

Since taking up our residence at Corcyra Villa, we had given over the vulgar habit of walking arm-in-arm; but that morning Mrs. Gummer came down to

Bow manners, and leant on me heavily, for Matilda is not a light weight, and by reason of her size her movement is semi-circular, and rather dragging. This remark does not apply to her tongue, which is remarkably active, and the nearest possible approach to perpetual motion. Yet on that occasion we walked along silent as funeral mutes pretend to be.

‘Gummer, if tongue-tying is a disease that comes to grown-ups, depend upon it I’ve caught it. My thoughts, Tom, are like a crowd at the theatre pit. Every one rushing and crushing to be first, and the consequence is a jam at the entrance—that is to say, my tongue.’

When we arrived at the cab-rank, I called for the first four-wheeler, and the first four-wheeler came.

‘We shall walk on,’ said Mrs. Gummer, in a peremptory tone; and she did so.

The four-wheeler followed us, and demanded a shilling for being called off the rank.

‘What does this mean, Matilda? Did you not promise the girls to take a cab? If we are not quick the firm will be out, and we shall have to wait half the day to see them.’

‘Mean, Gummer! What do you mean? Can’t you see that cabman squints? and don’t you know that a squint is unlucky? I would rather walk every inch of the way, if I fainted at every step, than go in a cab that squints.’

I had to give the squinting man a shilling, and we walked on until we met a cab-driver who was a

straight-eyed man. The horse was a bay, which Mrs. Gummer remarked was lucky.

The bay was not fast, or free from vice; and the straight-eyed cabman shaved wheels, and, after bumping his fare, chaffed the other drivers. Mrs. Gummer concluded that the lawyers had paid the cabman to pick us up and smash us, and I could hardly persuade her that the idea was absurd.

At length we reached Bedford Row. In the hurry and excitement, no bargain had been made with cabby, and he asked about two hundred per cent. too much. Mrs. Gummer took his number, handed him her name and address and the correct fare, and told him to summons.

Cabby remarked that 'the hact didn't mean a ton of humanity at a tanner a mile.'

'Take no notice of him, Gummer. I am not ashamed of my size, and I think very meanly of a mother of a family who is a scrag.'

We looked at the name of Sparkes and Son on the door.

'That was not painted yesterday, Gummer, but looks quite dirty and old-established. But we mustn't be led by appearances. There is such a thing as blacking and water being put into a cobwebbed bottle and selling it as fine old port. Poor pa knew a party who was a wholesale bottle cobwebber to cheap wine-cheaters.'

CHAPTER XII.

THE GREAT NEWS IS TRUE.

THE offices of Messrs. Sparkes and Son are on the first floor, and getting upstairs was a severe trial to Matilda, and we had to rest at the top of the first flight.

‘If, Tom, I’m struggling for my wind when we face him, don’t let him think that it’s the news, but tell him short breath is my complaint, and runs in the family.’

When we reached the first floor we rested for a minute.

‘Tom, it’s no use waiting for breath, for get my breath I shan’t till he confesses to his own letter. Moreover, I am not partial to standing in a draught that would cut through a diamond as easy as a pat does dog-day butter. Moreover, go in without knocking, which shows one’s consequence.’

I was about to open the door of the clerk’s office when Matilda seized my hand.

‘Don’t you see the door with ‘private’ on it?

What have people who come about a fortune to do with clerks ?

‘Nonsense, Matilda. We must ask if Mr. Sparkes is in.’

‘You may call me a fool, and, of course, you will do as you like, but crawling is not the way to rise, and if anything goes wrong, don’t blame me.’

We entered the office, and I asked if Mr. Sparkes was in.

‘Senior or junior ?’

The clerk was a very much-dressed young man, who spoke languidly.

‘Old Mr. Sparkes,’ replied Mrs. Gummer, in a voice that betrayed no shortness of breath.

The office-boy tittered. The languid clerk stuck a round piece of unrimmed glass in his left eye, and examined Mrs. Gummer curiously. ‘As if,’ she said, ‘I was a new sort of animal just invented by the British Museum.’

‘What name ?’

‘Thomas Gummer.’

‘And Mrs. Thomas Gummer,’ added my wife.

‘Is it anything I can do for you ?’

‘No, young man, it isn’t,’ said Mrs. Gummer. ‘The only party that can do for us is old Mr. Sparkes, and if he is too busy there are plenty of lawyers who will do for us.’

The unrimmed glass dropped from the left eye of the languid clerk. He bade the boy tell Mr. Sparkes that persons of the name of Gummer were asking for him.

He then stood at parade drill ease, gazed placidly at the ceiling, and hummed a tune.

We were not kept waiting. Mr. Sparkes, an elderly gentleman, cased in black cloth set off with a huge white neckerchief and diamond studs, came out of the inner room door in great haste.

‘Delighted to see you, Mr. Gummer. Proud to have this opportunity of paying my respects to you, Mrs. Gummer. Mr. Noddle, sir’—this was to the languid clerk—‘how is it you allow Mr. and Mrs. Gummer to stand?’

All the tune and the stare were taken out of the languid clerk.

If Mr. Sparkes, senior, had been our foster-brother, he could not have been more cordial. He drew an easy-chair close to the fire, and put Mrs. Gummer in it. He asked me to take a seat near to Matilda, and then sat down opposite to us. It was like a cosy family party after a Sunday dinner.

‘So your good relation has gone to a better world, Mrs. Gummer?’

Throughout the interview Mr. Sparkes addressed himself principally to Mrs. Gummer. Mr. Sparkes might or might not be up in law, but he was thoroughly posted in human nature.

‘Yes, sir,’ said Mrs. Gummer, ‘poor dear Joseph has been tomahawked. If the event had not been fully expected, it would have been a shock we could not have got over.’

‘Tomahawked! Dear me, is it possible? Bless

me! I had no idea such deeds were done in British India. You knew of the melancholy event, I presume, before the receipt of our letter?

Mrs. Gummer made a noise that was a cross between a giggle and a cough.

‘Well, to be sure, Mr. Sparkes, that is a question to put about a relation who never had a thought apart from us! Knew of it? Of course we did! Poor Joseph was so regular in his——’

And then Matilda broke down, for it occurred to her that our lamented relative could hardly have announced his own death.

‘To be sure, to be sure. Well, I am rejoiced to say that Mr. Joseph has left the whole of his property to Mr. Gummer. For, my dear madam, when we go we cannot take our property with us, and we must bow to the mysterious will of Providence. But what we cannot take we can bequeath to those who are near and dear to us, and that has been done by your lamented relative.’

Mr. Sparkes unlocked an iron safe and took out Messrs. Leopard and Co.’s letter, which notified Messrs.

Sparkes and Son that Mr. Joseph Gummer, merchant,



of Calcutta, had left the whole of his property to his nephew, Mr. Thomas Gummer, of Bow, he being the only relative who had not begged and borrowed of him. Messrs. Leopard and Co. said they were the professional advisers of the late Mr. Joseph Gummer, and in their opinion his estate would realise about £40,000.

The confirmation of the great news overcame Matilda, and she took out her pocket-handkerchief and cried with a vigour that made me fear an attack of hysterics. But she knew it would not just then be prudent to indulge in that complaint, and so I was spared the aggravation.

‘Come, come, Mrs. Gummer, you are distressing your good husband, and will make yourself ill. Your relative was not young, and your tears can’t bring him back. I consider,’ continued Mr. Sparkes, with emphasis, ‘that it is ungrateful to the beloved and venerated dead when people do not enjoy property that comes to them by will.’

‘Of course, Mr. Sparkes; but when one is surprised——’

Matilda stopped short, bit her under lip, and ceased to cry.

‘Of course, when I say surprised, I mean that, though we expected it for months, it comes like a surprise at last.’

Then we began to talk about the business. Mr Sparkes would be happy to confer with my solicitor, or he would be happy to act for me in the matter.

Matilda pinched my arm, which I interpreted to mean that Sparkes was to act for me, and I told him so. Mr. Sparkes, who had received us like a foster-brother, became still more affectionately bland. He would take care to protect our interests.

‘Is there any danger of those Leopards cheating us?’ asked Matilda, in some alarm.

‘Certainly not, my dear madam. They are a most respectable firm. We are their London agents, and trust them implicitly. We shall write for particulars, and as soon as we receive them someone will have to go out to realise the estate. For though we implicitly trust our esteemed friends that will be necessary. I presume that Mr. Gummer will not care about seeing India, though it is the most resplendent gem in the crown of our beloved Sovereign?’

‘I should think not indeed,’ said Matilda. ‘The father of a family, with a wife and two poor dear girls, shall not set his foot in such a tomahawking climate.’

‘When the time comes, that is, as soon as we get advices from the other side, and we have put the realisation in training, I will persuade my son to undertake the business. It will be a holiday to him, and he is an able man of business, and in making that observation, believe me, my dear madam, I speak as a member of my honourable profession, and not as a father.’

‘When shall we get the money?’ asked Mrs. Gummer.

‘My dear madam, it is impossible to give you a precise answer. Perhaps in eight or nine months the

estate, or the greater part of it, will be in Mr. Gummer's hands.'

'What a time to wait! One might as well be without the fortune,' said Mrs. Gummer.

'But in the meantime, my dear madam, the money is making more interest in India than it will make here; and if Mr. Gummer wants the immediate use of a few thousands he can have them at the usual English rate, so that you will gain and not lose by the inevitable delay.'

After some more conversation, I arranged to see Mr. Sparkes, to read over the draft of the letter to be sent to Calcutta, and we departed. Mr. Sparkes not only sent for a cab for us, but escorted us to the landing, and told the languid clerk to show us to the cab. Matilda was very gracious to Mr. Noddle, and, just as the cab drew away, put a shilling into his hand, and I saw the young man redden with indignation.

'As we are in with the Sparkeses, Tom, it is better to be in with their clerk. I am not for throwing shillings away, and depend upon it, that shilling is not thrown away, but will earn its pound's worth.'

My impression was that Mr. Noddle threw it after the cab, but I did not vex Matilda by telling her so.

'Forty thousand, Tom! If it isn't double that my name isn't Matilda Gummer. Do you think a rich man like poor Joseph knows exactly all he is worth? And do you suppose that he would tell his lawyers the whole amount of what he knew he was worth? Forty thousand is forty thousand, and, if we were put to

it, we could do with it ; but we will not be fooled with a forty when it is at least double forty. Then there is his watch, and his chain, and his rings, and his studs, and his pins, and the money in his house, and his clothes. Do you think your Leopards will take care of things that are always stolen when there is a chance? Gummer, I feel we are being robbed, and I am downright miserable.'

'It is provoking, Matilda, but we must put up with it and try to make the best of what is coming to us. I will go to the office, and the cab will take you home.'

'No *you* don't, Gummer, and no *it* won't. Being in my state I could not go home alone if I had a royal carriage to take me. Moreover, you have your fortune to look after, and your back is turned on Purrem and Mangles, who, when they pay up to the time you have left them, will not deduct the day you were away without leave, as they would do if you were poor and needed it. The salary is a loss, but you can't have all your eyes on your Purrem and Mangles and also on the fortune. Moreover, Tom, with the money we are being robbed of in India, I am not going to pay a cab all the way to the Green Lanes. A full 'bus is a trial, particularly if the parties are stout, but being robbed by a cabman is worse.

'Well, my dear, let the office take its chance to-day, for I could not settle to work ; but, for the sake of the girls, who are anxious, let us get home as soon as we can by the cab.'

‘ Well, Tom, for the sake of the poor dear girls, who are our flesh and blood, I will cab it ; but I will be summoned rather than pay his demand if it’s over an extra sixpence. But, before I am jolted another yard, I must moisten my poor throat, which feels like cracking.’

I told cabby to stop at the first pastrycook’s.

‘ No, Gummer, eat I can’t ; and if eat I could, ten-penny Dorset pastry, all fluff and puff, at twopence a mouthful, should not load the stomach of Matilda Gummer. And pastrycooks’ drinks, which are warm and flat, are not my likings. Publics are vulgar—but is that a reason why a poor parched body is not to have a drink of cool beer to save her from a faint, and for which she is willing to pay ? Cabby, pull up at a respectable place.’

Having refreshed with half-and-half, which has always been Matilda’s lunch, and treated cabby to a toothful, that is, half a quartern of gin, we travelled to the Green Lanes at a moderate pace.

What a scene there was when we arrived at Corcyra Villa. At Matilda’s suggestion we had discharged the cab before we came in sight of the house.

‘ The poor dear girls know that their mother is not a cabber, and if they see a cab come up they will think the fortune is gone, and I was too upset to walk.’

The girls had made up their minds that we should return in a cab to announce the confirmation of the

great news ; and when, from the garden-gate, they saw us on foot, they rushed into the house with a cry of anguish. We found Nancy with her head buried in the couch pillow, and Janet lying on the hearthrug, beating a frantic tattoo with her heels.

‘ Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear ! ’ cried Nancy.

‘ Don’t speak ; oh don’t, don’t, don’t ! It’s gone ! Oh, oh, oh ! ’ roared Janet.

It was at least five minutes before we could make them understand the great news was confirmed. Then came another outbreak of hysterics, in which Matilda joined, and which lasted on and off for nearly an hour. When they were not laughing like tickled hyenas, they were blubbering like scolded children, who did not know the use of a pocket-handkerchief.

The day of our coming into a fortune was long and weary. We could not settle to work or to amusement. The event was so great and unexpected that we could not even talk about it. We were all busy thinking or dreaming. No visitor would have suspected that we had come into a fortune, but rather that we had lost all our property and all our friends. I was shocked when I caught sight of my face in the glass. I looked as I have seen men do when, after a short imprisonment, they are put in the dock to be tried. Matilda was also haggard, and complained of exhaustion. The girls were pale, with bleared eyes, and noses swollen and reddish. Looking back upon that day, I ask myself which is the worst to bear, good fortune or bad fortune. I remember a lecturer saying that there is a pressure

of tons upon the human body, and that but for the pressure of the air we should fly into a thousand pieces. I take it that life is much the same. Very bad fortune breaks a man down. Sudden good fortune takes off the pressure, and makes us ready to burst. It is the mixture we want, and it is the mixture we generally get.

We went to bed earlier than usual, but we did not sleep for hours. For half the night we were turning and settling the pillows, and striking matches to see the time. At last I slept, but not for many minutes, for Matilda shook me violently, and then asked me if I was asleep, which was one of her habits.

‘Gummer, if the fortune isn’t in the pocket of that old Sparkes my head is not on my shoulders, which it is. And you that have been in the law all the days of your life to be fooled by him, and to shut your eyes whilst you saw the poor dear girls being robbed before your face.’

‘Nonsense! How can the fortune be in his pocket?’

‘That is your heart-stabbing and soul-crushing way, and I am used to it. Calling me a fool in the middle of the night, not knowing who may live to see the day! Fool I may be, but I am not so far gone as to quietly let that old Sparkes’s smooth tongue do the poor dear girls out of their rights. Since you are so mighty clever that you call me a fool, not only by day, but wake me out of my sleep to do it, perhaps you will just tell me how old Sparkes can advance you part of the

fortune if he has not got it, seeing that which isn't in his pocket can't come out? And if you can't answer me, be a man and let that old Sparkes know that we are not living in India, but in a police land. And if you are not man enough to do it, the poor dear girls shall bless a mother, who may be a fool, but who isn't a coward.'

After half-an-hour's dispute, we both fell asleep, but I was again aroused by a gentle shake, followed by a severe pinch.

'Gummer, there are thieves in the house. Be a man, face them, and save the fortune.'

I was obliged to go downstairs to pacify her, but, though I am a man, I took care to make such a noise as I descended that if there had been thieves they would have had warning and time to get off.

I had not been more than a few minutes asleep after the false alarm about the burglars when Mrs. Gummer again shook me to ask if I was awake.

'Gummer, I have been thinking about going to Court. The girls may, but not me. No, Tom, don't expect it; for to kneel before my live Queen, and to see her with her crown on, and to kiss her hand, is more than my poor nerves is equal to. I have seen the crown and the ball in the Tower, and I recollect my feelings; and, with my bringing-up, and at my age, and with my short breath and spasms, that is as much as I can go through.'

Before seven o'clock the girls bounced into our room.

'Lor, what is the matter? Don't keep it from me. Is it Sparkes and Son?'

‘No, ma,’ said Nancy; ‘but we could not sleep, and we were tired of fidgeting in bed.’

‘It would be so dreadful,’ said Janet, ‘if after all the fortune did not come. It would kill us.’

‘My dear, that has been put into your head by your pa. I call such doubting Providence worse than blasphemy.’

‘But one can’t help it, ma,’ replied Nancy; ‘and I know that even you would like proof positive, and Janet and I have thought it a capital plan; if pa will only have the courage to do it.’

‘Nancy, if it’s your pa going to a climate that killed your pa’s cousin, where white people are blistered by night, scorched by day, and are always being yellow-fevered at the risk of their lives, I say “No” to your plan.’

‘Well, ma, you must think we are brutes,’ said Janet.

‘Why, ma,’ exclaimed Nancy, ‘you know we wouldn’t let pa go to India. Do hear our plan. You told us yesterday about the lawyer being willing to advance some money.’

‘There, Gummer. What did I tell you in the night? I told your pa, and I was snapped at for my pains as if I was a tramp being house-dogged, that old Sparkes has the fortune in his pocket, or he would not, and could not, advance it.’

‘Oh, ma, you are so nervous. How can the man have it in his pocket?’

‘Now that you see your children following your ex-

ample, and sitting upon the words of their own mother, and trampling upon her judgment, perhaps you are satisfied, Mr. Gummer.'

'Ma,' said Nancy, 'don't be cross. Is it likely, if Mr. Sparkes had the fortune, and meant to cheat us, he would have written?'

'Never mind about me. I am only your mother, and your father's drudge. But when you have played with your mouse, and lost it, don't come to the cat to catch it. However, it's little good the fortune will do me at my age, and with my short breath and spasms, and it would be a stupid cat that spit fire and roughed her fur because she was not allowed to catch mice for others' eating.'

'Really, ma, you are unkind,' said Janet. 'Will there be any harm in pa asking Mr. Sparkes to advance him a lot of money? If he refuses we are no worse off. If he does, we shall know the fortune is there.'

Matilda came to her temper over breakfast, and I went to Mr. Sparkes, for I confess even I had my doubts, and longed for proof.



Mr. Sparkes gave me a cheque for £1000, and promised £4000 at the end of a week, merely on the security of an order

to pay himself out of the funds of the Joseph Gummer's estate.

As Mrs. Gummer remarked, it is easy to borrow when you are rich and do not particularly want the money.

I cashed the cheque in £5 notes, and when I came home and spread the two hundred bank-notes on the table, there was a scream of delight. We wept. We kissed each other. We really danced for joy.

We were no longer in doubt, and, as a proof of our confidence, Mrs. Gummer told the news to our domestic. She tried to look astonished, but did not succeed. Probably she had heard us talk about the fortune.

Science says that sound ascends, but in domestic life it does the reverse, for what is whispered in the parlour is heard in the kitchen.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WORRIES OF WEALTH.

It is common to hear people wishing they were what they are not, but I never heard of a man saying he wished he was a woman. On the other hand, most women, particularly when they are not well pleased, wish, or pretend to wish, that they were men. Matilda is not an exception to the rule, and over and over again she has exclaimed : ‘Ah, Gummer, I wish I’d been the man.’ Also, she argues that man has the best of it. On one occasion, when the girls had been learning their grammar, and Matilda came downstairs after tucking them up for the night, she observed :

‘What grammar says is right, of course ; but there is no need to teach boys that the masculine is superior to the feminine, for the he is put before the she from the time of coming into the world. If it’s a boy, pa and ma are doubly pleased. So long as the boys of a family can be started in life the girls can be left to Fate, which is much the same as leaving a garden to grow flowers without gardening, and the consequence is choking weeds. A boy may sow crops of wild oats,

On the following Saturday, the *Green Lanes Herald* published the subjoined account in letters big enough for an infant-school-child, in its words of one syllable :

‘AN ENORMOUS ACCESSION OF FORTUNE.—It is our gratifying privilege to announce that our greatly and deservedly esteemed neighbour, Thomas Gummer, Esq., of Corcyra Villa, has been left sole heir to his recently deceased cousin, who was the richest merchant in the capital of our Indian Empire. The lowest estimate of the property thus bequeathed is £200,000, and it is stated on authority to be a quarter of a million sterling. Mr. Gummer has no male heir, and the whole of his immense wealth will be inherited by his two amiable, beautiful, and accomplished daughters. It is our devout aspiration that Mr. Gummer and his excellent lady may long live to enjoy the riches which they know so well how to dispense, and which are the meet reward of their exalted virtues.’

This elegant leading article was copied into the town papers, and millions of people knew the name of Gummer. We simpered, pouted, coloured, and declared that it was a shame for the papers to interfere with private affairs, but we really liked it.

‘Tom,’ said Mrs. Gummer, ‘upstartishness is not my nature, nor contrariwise is my nature cold vealish ; and, I must say, it is lovely nice to be a somebody, and figure in the papers.’

The mistake as to the amount was perplexing, and I proposed to write to the *Herald* and correct it.

‘Gummer, if you are not blind and mad, you ought to be both, and I blush for you. Are you to put your judgment against that of the newspapers? Do you suppose that they don’t know what they are about? Do you suppose that the *Green Lanes Herald* would

dare state a quarter of a million on authority, if it was not a quarter of a million on authority? I thought that old Sparkes was too civil to be honest; but the papers have spoilt his cheating, for now we know the leavings of poor dear Joseph.'

'But surely, surely, Matilda, you don't imagine it's a quarter of a million, or even £200,000?'

'Imagine! No, I don't imagine, when I see a thing in black and white. I know it. And I will swear to it. And if there is a penny under the quarter of a million handed over to us, your Leopards and your Sparkeses shall know what law means, and that if a father will see the pockets of his poor dear girls picked behind their backs, their despised mother won't. Oh, Thomas Gummer, your aggravation is enough to make the flesh of an angel creep and crawl, and if wills could be altered in the other world poor Joseph would change his, and leave the fortune to some one who would not try to little it down to a paltry £40,000. The paper says it's a quarter of a million, and what can't speak can't lie, and that is more than can be said of old Sparkes, for he can speak, and he can do the other thing, and what is more, Gummer, he has done it.'

The girls agreed with their mother; I was in due time persuaded; and we all believed in the quarter of a million. So did the public, for people always think the best about the rich. Our letter-bag, equal in size to a clothes-bag, was hardly big enough to hold the deliveries. Secretaries of charities wrote for donations. Tradesmen sent circulars. Mining agents offered

shares that would yield two hundred per cent. per annum. Promoters of public companies expressed their willingness to place me on their boards of directors. One correspondent solicited the honour of procuring me a degree, from a foreign university, for the sum of twenty pounds; and another promised me the rank of baron for a trifling consideration. A gentleman connected with the turf would not object to purchase a racing stud for me; and he could guarantee that I should win the Derby, and pot £100,000. We were asked to subscribe for new churches and new schools. People I had never heard of sent their congratulations, and avowed their confidence that an old and needy friend would be remembered in the hour of prosperity. Geniuses wanted a little money to complete grand inventions. An author solicited a few pounds to enable him to finish the most important work of the age, which he proposed to dedicate to me. Unfortunate tradesmen craved a trifle just to set them up in business, and the loan would be repaid with blessings and interest. We could not read all the letters, much less answer them.

Mrs. Gummer, who had always looked after the grease, rags, and waste-paper—for our little independence was like a house built of bricks, each one not worth much in itself—said:

‘Well, Tom, if these letters and such like do not make waste enough to pay a month’s butter, then I am as stupid as a rocking-horse, or we shall get through butter enough for fifty families. Where the rags come

from to make such mountains of paper puzzles me ; and depend upon it, if things go on in such a manner, rags will be dearer than new long-cloth by the piece.'

But the callers were a far greater nuisance than the letters. They insisted upon seeing us, and if we did not give them what they asked they were not particularly civil.

Mr. Sydney Northumberland Cumberland Lennox gave me a vast deal of trouble. His dress was shabby, and his face unpromising. He had been plunged into the direst poverty by the failure of a bank, and though he was connected by blood with the noblest families of England, and his son was heir to an estate worth a rent-roll of twelvethousand twohundred and twenty-two pounds ten shillings per annum.—Mr. S. N. C. Lennox read from the report of the agent of the estate—yet he was at that time so reduced that he often went without a dinner. Mrs. Gummer asked him why he did not borrow of his noble and wealthy relations. The reply would have brought down the gallery of an East-end theatre :

'Madam, permit me to tell you that Sydney Northumberland Cumberland Lennox knows how to bear the gnawing teeth of famine without a groan, but never shall it be recorded of him that he deigned to ask a favour of the proud scions of his father's house.'

Mrs. Gummer ordered the tray with the cold roast beef to be brought in, and Mr. Lennox was good enough to refresh himself with our meat and ale. He

asked for horseradish sauce, but we had none. He then asked for French mustard, but we could not accommodate him. Mrs. Gummer was half deceived by Mr. S. N. C. Lennox, but I knew he was an impostor, and refused to give him a penny. On the strength of Mrs. Gummer's sympathy he pestered us with letters and calls, but at last I handed his letters over to the Mendicity Society, and that put an end to the Sydney Northumberland Cumberland Lennox nuisance.

Dr. Distillem, who called about the same time, was a thin man with a long face, and a complexion that suggested the need of much blue pill to spur an inactive liver. He was dressed like an undertaker who had been long out of employment, for the seams of his black clothes were very visible, and his shirt-front looked as if it had been slept in for a week. He alarmed Mrs. Gummer by saying :

‘I bring a message from your cousin who lately died in India.’

Presently the doctor explained that he was a medium, that last night the spirit of our deceased relative had been with him, and that he had sent a message to us. The message was that we were to treat Dr. Distillem as a brother, and at once form a spiritualistic circle.

‘Not if I know it,’ said Mrs. Gummer. ‘I’ve been to one of your performances, and I am not to be let in by the pretence that spirits come to play the banjo, slap faces, and scrawl on slates. Turn him out, Gummer.’

Dr. Distillem put himself on the hearthrug and went into a trance.

‘I’ll cure him, Tom. Water would spoil the rug, but I will just run this darning-needle into his cheek.’

The eyelids of Dr. Distillem opened a little, just enough to see the needle, and Mrs. Gummer putting on her thimble. He got up and left us with a curse and much bad language.

The ladies, particularly those who solicited subscriptions, were downright rude, as rude as Dr. Distillem, except that they used politer bad language. They declined to take ‘No’ for an answer. They reminded us that we were only the stewards of our wealth, and could not take our riches out of the world. When we still declined to subscribe to the ‘Association for Preventing Sailors and other Persons from Teaching Parrots to Use Profane Language,’ we were sentenced, in an unctuous voice, to eternal torment.

But, in spite of the coaxings and the cursings, it was very little that we gave away, or even spent just at the outset. Now we had so much, we were more afraid of parting with our money than when we had a little.

‘Gummer,’ said Matilda, ‘money and drink are the same. . The more you drink the thirstier you are, and the less drink the less thirst. The richer people are, the less they like to give away, unless they get an idea they won’t live long and invest in charity what they can’t take with them. Poor pa used to call legacies to charities speculative fire insurances.’

We became so nervous about losing our money, that Mrs. Gummer begged of me not to keep any cash at a private banker's, but to put every sixpence in the Bank



of England. We had double fastenings on the doors, and the windows barred up prison-fashion, because Mrs. Gummer was sure that all the burglars in London would be upon us. We bought a bull-dog for the garden and a terrier for the house; and we had a board put up, on which was

painted, 'Beware of the bull-dog and of spring-revolvers.' I never saw a spring-revolver, but I thought it would be a first-rate scare-thief. These precautions did not make us easy. Before going to bed we went over the house—I armed with the poker, Mrs. Gummer with the tongs. Four or five times a week I was roused out of my sleep by Mrs. Gummer, who fancied she heard a noise. Then, after putting on my dressing-gown, I had to go downstairs and search, with the poker in one hand and a candle in the other. If I hesitated Mrs. Gummer would say :

'Surely a man who is one, and a father, will not let his poor family be murdered because he is afraid to face thieves.'

It is all very well to talk of being brave, but a bullet

from a pistol or a blow from a bludgeon is as unpleasant for a man as for a woman. However, I stamped heavily, rattled the poker against the banisters, and went down slowly; so that, if there had been thieves, they would have heard me coming, and have had plenty of time to get off with a fair share of their booty. I am not a coward, but I must confess that I would rather be robbed than murdered.

Mrs. Gummer was far ahead of me in carefulness. When there was a talk of buying, she would remark :

‘Gummer, every fool can open his veins, and bleed rivers till he is dead and buried; but it takes something cleverer than a fool to stop the bleeding, leave alone getting back the blood that has flowed away

Still, before we had been a month people of fortune we were bored and persuaded into spending money upon what Mrs. Gummer called things that are of no use but to eat their own heads off in interest.

The girls had a note from Mrs. Bungay, asking them to a musical tea. The paper was coloured, creamed, and crested. Janet was of opinion that we ought not to be inferior to a doctor’s wife in our stationery. The cream and the colour were easy to procure, but the arms and the crest rather perplexed me. The only arms my father ever used were the royal arms on his bill-heads, and his crest, if he had a crest, was a golden boot. However, whilst we were debating the subject, we received a circular from a gentleman who finds, paints, engraves, and embosses

arms and crests. Forthwith I paid a visit to the shop of this obliging gentleman.

‘I want you to find me my arms and a crest.’

‘Will you favour me with your name and county?’

‘Thomas Gummer, Green Lanes.’

‘Was your father’s place in Middlesex?’

‘Gubbins Row, Bow.’

‘Certainly, sir. You would like the arms and crest emblazoned, and dies for paper? Certainly, sir.’



The arms and crest which this gentleman found and painted made a remarkable picture. In the middle of a round-cornered square there were three daggers, three card-counter fish, and a foreign-looking vegetable which

we were told was a gum-tree. On each side of these curiosities was a man, standing bolt upright, and nearly naked. There was also a young bantam perched on a short barber’s pole lying longways. The motto was, ‘Beware of my spurs.’

Mrs. Gummer was somewhat disappointed.

‘Tom, ugly tittlebats and daggers, a tree not fit for firewood, and men who, if they were real, would be taken up by the police, nakedness not being lawful, may be a genteel mixture; but this I will say, Tom, that a calf’s-head national schoolboy, who had never learnt drawing, unless he was in the errand line and had to draw a truck, would have made a more sensible, a

genteeler, and prettier picture. And if that is what our ancestors thought pretty and decent, I am glad I didn't live in their time. Perhaps it is because we know so little of our ancestors that we think so much of them. Pa knew a dealer in antique things and articles of vertu, and I tell you, Tom, antique chairs are back-breaking, and antique china is neither useful nor pretty. As for that dealer's articles of vertu, I never saw them, and if I had, perhaps I shouldn't have thought much of them.'

The gentleman who found our arms and crest supplied us with a monogram, that is, the initials of my name written in such a way that no one could read them, and they might pass for any other initials.

Extravagance number two was in this wise. One sunny morning a sparkling brougham pulled up at the gate, and a gentleman, who, like the brougham, seemed newly varnished, got out, and rang the bell. Who it was we could not guess, and we were not much wiser when our page brought a card with the name of Lazarus engraved on it. The gentleman, being shown in, was not slow to tell who he was, and his business. His firm were jewellers, and they had been informed that I was about to select some family ornaments. Before we could get in a word he had brought out half a dozen little cases, and handed us rings, earrings, necklaces, bracelets, brooches, and pins. It was an illumination of jewellery, and we were almost afraid of handling so many precious things. Mr. Lazarus was a pleasant gentleman. I told him we did not think of

buying at present, but he said that was of no consequence, and the ladies might like to inspect the jewels. He persuaded mamma and the girls to put on the ornaments, and very splendid they looked. When the prices were mentioned Mrs. Gummer began to pull off the rings as quickly as she could; but there was one ring that would not pass the joint.



‘You can remove it at your leisure, and return it to me at any time, or keep it, if you will do us the honour,’ said the obliging Mr. Lazarus.

In the end we laid out over two hundred pounds. When I was writing the cheque, Mr.

Lazarus told me not to be at the trouble of paying then: and he smiled when I replied that I was a cash man, and always took the discount.

‘There, Tom, I do think jewels are a cruel waste of money. Taking it that Mr. L—— is right, and we could get our two hundred back when we liked to sell, yet so long as we keep them there is interest on the two hundred sunk and lost, for things to look at don’t meat us, or drink us, or cover us. But it was polite of the young man to leave me the ring, which I believe will never pass my knuckle without cutting. Moreover, it was civil not to care about the cash.’

We began from that hour to buy freely, and we were not allowed to pay cash. As soon as the news of our great fortune spread about, everybody was anxious to give us credit. The girls bought dresses, and they were sent home without the bill. Our butcher, who had lately stipulated for monthly payments, asked the favour of quarterly or half-yearly accounts.

Well, this is an aggravating world. Let any one want credit, and he can't get it. Let any one have a large fortune, and not want credit, and people will hardly take his ready money.

'Tom,' said Mrs. Gummer, 'it is human nature to do what we might well let alone, and to let alone what it would be better to do. When salmon was cheap, and not like eating money, we had it, and also shrimp sauce ; but when our fish was plaice, we had no 'ticer, for the melted butter was plain, with more flour than butter in it. Yet, Tom, salmon is by itself rich enough for any palate ; whilst plaice is sloppy, and tastes only of the water, and wants the sauce that salmon does not want. The long and short of it is this, Tom—salmon is worth the sauce it don't want, and gets it ; and plaice is not worth the sauce it wants, and doesn't get it.'

CHAPTER XIV.

PUBLIC RECOGNITION.

BEFORE we came into our fortune the Green Lanes gentility would not so much as look at us. After we came into our fortune Green Lanes gentility was perpetually staring and smiling at us. We needed no introductions, for people sought our acquaintance. The rector called, and asked me to smoke a cigar in the rectory garden. He never smoked, but he understood that I did, and the garden was pleasantly situated. The rector's wife called, and insisted upon Mrs. Gummer and the girls going to the rectory to tea. They were getting up a bazaar for the benefit of the organ fund, and the rector's wife hoped our girls would contribute to it, and also preside at one of the stalls. 'You have no idea, Mrs. Gummer, how the presence of your charming and distinguished daughters will help our cause.' The single curate, who had been so ungracious anent the slippers and the braces, became a constant caller, supped with us two or three times, sang glees with the girls, insisted upon having

their photographs, and made a point of staring at Nancy whilst he was reading the service, and also whilst the rector was preaching. The pew-opener, who had allowed us to wander up the aisle and open our own door, now left everybody to wait on us. Moreover, when we were seated in our pew, she would put James our page in a free seat. I believe that a rich man's toad, if he had a toad, would be caressed and petted. Our excellent Dr. Bungay called without being sent for ; he thought the girls were poorly, that physic would do them no good, and insisted upon their taking daily drives with Mrs. Bungay.

My first appearance in public as a public man was at the schoolrooms, where, to oblige the rector, I took the chair at a lecture. Perhaps I ought to be ashamed to confess that we were proud when we saw bills in the shop-windows, on the hoardings, and at the church doors, announcing a lecture on the manners and customs of the aborigines of Central China by the Rev. Mr. Blinkem, the chair to be taken at eight o'clock precisely by Thomas Gummer, Esq., of Corcyra Villa. Seeing that bill as we were going into church we thought of it on and off during the service. Sinners we were, and miserable sinners we might have been, but we did not feel miserable.

I had a grand reception at the schoolroom, in which the people were jammed like sardines in a box. There were shouts of applause when I appeared, louder shouts when I was moved into the chair, and deafening roars of applause when I called on the rev.

lecturer to begin. The chairman at a lecture may be useful, and he may be ornamental, but his position is not pleasant. If he faces the lecturer, he is too near to enjoy the lecture, for he sees the nervous twitchings of the lecturer. If the chairman is behind, he has to watch the movements of the lecturer's coat-tails, and can count how often the pocket-handkerchief is taken out. There is a circumstance about my first appearance in public that is perhaps worth mentioning. I am not first-rate at oratory, at least I was not until I came into the fortune, and that night I was particularly nervous. To the best of my knowledge and belief every syllable I stammered out was: 'I beg to call on the Rev. Mr. Blinkem to begin.' And when the vote of thanks was moved to me for my conduct in the chair, I said: 'I beg to thank you for—for—for the way in which you have been good enough to propose it; and you, ladies and gentlemen, for the way in which you have responded to the toast—that is—I mean, for my conduct this night.'

And down I sat, feeling hot and cold at the same time, amidst loud applause.

The following report appeared in the *Green Lanes Herald*:

'Mr. Gummer, who was loudly cheered, said that it afforded him infinite pleasure to take the chair that night, as he felt the deepest interest in the great cause of popular education, and especially in the schools of his own neighbourhood. He would not intervene between the lecturer and the audience, but would at once call upon the rev. gentleman to proceed. . . .

'The vote of thanks having been carried by acclamation, the worthy chairman—whose rising was the signal for a renewed outburst of such cheers as can only issue from the lungs of Britons—said: "It affords me the greatest delight to meet my friends and neighbours; and whatever I can do for you at any time I shall do with pleasure, and I pray you to command my services. I hope that the eloquent lecture we have just listened to will result in a goodly subscription to the Green Lanes Labourers' Institute. Depend upon it, ladies and gentlemen, that whatever we do to make the refulgent sun of knowledge dispel the mists of midnight ignorance, is a noble service to our day and generation, and to days and generations that as yet are lurking in the silent eggshells of Time." This magnificent peroration was cheered to the echo.'



'Matilda, I never said and never thought anything of the sort.'

'Stuff, Gummer! How, in the fluster and flurry, which made my heart go a million to a minute, could you or any other man know what he thought or said, except those whose business it is to know? What is the use of saying you never said it, when there it is staring you in the face in black and white?'

When I was appointed one of the Judges of the Green Lanes Flower Show, I felt rather nervous.

In our Bow garden we grew roses, sweet Williams, heart's-ease, nasturtiums, scarlet-runners, and London pride, and that is all I knew about flowers. At Tudor House I did not learn the Latin names of flowers, and, in my opinion, they ought to be abolished. It is no

shame for a man, leave alone a woman, not to know Latin ; and learned folks ought to know their mother-tongue by heart, and be proud of it. Calling flowers by their English names would be a convenience to the million, and it would not be any loss to those who talk Latin. Dead languages ought to be buried, and not kept above ground to annoy respectable people. I determined to decline the invitation, much to the annoyance of the girls, who had ordered lovely dresses and sweet bonnets for the occasion. Matilda agreed with me when I explained the difficulty.

‘It is vexatious, Gummer ; but of course, if a horse feels he is not equal to a leap that is put before him, he is better in his stable. If you don’t try you can’t fail, and people may think you are equal to what you are unequal, you being too wise to try.’

I wrote to Colonel de Crespín, the President of the Green Lanes Flower Show, to inform him that a pressure of business would prevent my attendance, and begging him to get someone else to act as judge. The Colonel answered my note in person. If I did not attend, the show would be a failure. Could I not come for two hours ?

I blurted out a half-truth, and told the Colonel that I really was not competent to form a judgment on the respective merits of groups of flowers.

‘My dear Mr. Gummer,’ said the Colonel, ‘you are really too conscientious. We want your patronage, and we are not so idiotic as to expect that a man of fortune has the horticultural knowledge of a gardener.

Being poor and compelled to kill time with simple pursuits, I happen to know a little about flowers, and shall be delighted to walk through the Show with you. Come to the gathering, because, as you are the lion of the neighbourhood, your absence will be a disappointment. And, my dear Mr. Gummer, as the political hurdy-gurdies say, "property has its duties."

So we went to the show, and our appearance was superb. Mrs. Gummer was attired in a flowered *gros de Naples* at eleven shilling a yard, and which cost more for making and trimmings than the silk did. The girls were in gorgeous flimsy, and looked charming.

'Tom,' said Mrs. Gummer, 'although I am their own doating mother, and ought to hold my tongue, I will not make a secret of a mother's feelings to their own father. A finer pair of heart-breakers were never eyed by man or woman, and I am proud of them. Fine feathers are a great set-off to the very worst of birds, but on the finest of birds, I tell you, Tom, they make a mother proud of her own precious offsprings, and a mother who is honest need not blush to own her sentiments to her lawful wedded husband.'

I had no trouble whatever in deciding upon the best groups of flowers. Colonel Crespín pointed out certain flowers as the best, and all I did was to nod.

The excellent *Green Lanes Herald* announced that—

'Mr. Gummer was very particular in his examination, and evinced the finest horticultural taste and irreproachable judgment in selecting the prizes. His awards gave unlimited satisfaction to the competitors, and to all concerned.'

So I learnt that if a man has a big fortune he can do anything. Knowledge is power, and money is knowledge, for it buys it.

Not always. I suppose that if a rich man were upset in the water, and he had never learnt to swim, he would have a bad chance of drowning.

‘Well, Tom, even then a rich man might have a better chance than a pauper, for a rescue would be tried for the sake of a reward, unless the parties on the bank thought they were in the drowning rich man’s will.’

CHAPTER XV.

LEARNED, FINANCIAL, AND JOURNALISTIC.



MONEY cannot buy everything, but it is astonishing how much hand-squeezing and hand-clapping you can have for money. They say there is no royal road to learning, but there is a money road to literary fame. Poets and novelists offered to sell me manuscripts, or to write poems and novels to order, and they pledged their sacred word that never would they divulge the fact that I was not the author. If they had it would not much matter. Such vulgar slander of a rich man would not be believed. So, for a small expenditure, I might have become in name and fame a poet and a novelist!

For less than a hundred pounds, I could have had a score of alphabets after my name. For a ten-pound-note I could have been B.A., or M.A., or LL.D. So far as the average public is concerned, what is the odds whether you get a degree from Oxford or Cambridge,

or from 'an ancient and illustrious seat of learning' across the water? I met with a fellow who lives and thrives upon his M.D., though he is as ignorant of medicine as a leech is of law; and, manslaughter being punishable by law, he is not such a fool as to practise medicine. He is a literary and philanthropic M.D. He has, so says the Colonel, put together two or three books by cribbing out of old books at the British Museum library, and therefore he is an author. He is the projector and honorary secretary of The National Institution for the Diffusion of Fine Art and Science and the Amelioration of the Industrial Classes, and he is, therefore, a philanthropist. Upon the strength of his authorship, his philanthropy, and his M.D., he gets into debt, and to rogues who do not mean paying, credit is income. He is one of the clever thieves who steal, but keep clear of the meshes of the criminal law. After I had subscribed five guineas to his institution, my name was advertised as a vice-president. The Colonel then informed me that the fellow was an impudent impostor, and that his M.D. was a degree conferred upon him by a mesmeric college in New York.

How many learned societies there are in England I know not; but there are enough and to spare. Some, I dare say, are what they seem to be; but others are shams, of which anyone may become a fellow if he can beg, borrow, or steal a guinea or two for entrance-fee and subscription. These sham societies are supported by mean-minded manikins, who think it grand to have some letters after their names; by sharpers, who know

that letters after their names will help them to blind and plunder small tradesmen ; and by the dupes of the energetic secretaries, who have a commission on the subscriptions.

I was persuaded to become a Fellow of the Antediluvian Society of Great Britain. The professed object of the society is to discover the condition of the human race before the Flood. I attended one of the meetings, at which Dr. Festus Codem, a thin young man, with a cracked tin trumpet voice, read a paper ‘On some Human Bones discovered in a Cave on the Coast of New Guinea.’

Dr. Codem told us that the bones were not like any post-diluvian human bones, and that they were part of a skeleton of an infant giant, who was born about six millions of years ago. That is all I could make out of the paper, for every other word was a tongue-twister of at least ten syllables.

Dr. Codem offered to write a paper for me, and to have it printed in the ‘Transactions,’ for three guineas ; so that I might have become a scientific author on easy terms. I declined the tempting bargain ; but I lent Dr. Codem five pounds, which he forgot to return. When I mentioned it to him, he expressed surprise and indignation that a gentleman should be troubled about such a trifle. My F.A.S.G.B. cost me ten pounds five shillings.

I was elected a Vice President of the Mental Emancipation Association, and I presided at a lecture that was followed by a coffee and ice-cream talking-party.

‘Gummer,’ said Matilda to me on my way home, ‘Mental Emancipationers may be genteel, but I don’t think much of their sense. How do they know that everything that was wasn’t, and everything that is to be won’t be, and that everything that is is wrong, except themselves? One of them, a doctor with a short name and a long nose, told me he is proving that man is not properly made, because the continual growth of hair and nails is a waste of force. I turned on him, Tom, and said that if we were not wisely made, hair and nail, which has to be cut, wouldn’t be without feeling. He shook his head and muttered in a foreign language. Tom, just give the Mental Emancipationers the length of your shadow and a mile over, as poor pa used to say. Feeding our seven senses on thistles isn’t the way to keep them alive and well.’

I retired from the Association, but I had to pay twenty guineas for the honour of having been elected a Vice-President.

My financial adventure was rather more expensive. Mr. Floater is one of the most stylish individuals in town. He is a half-century bachelor, with chambers in St. James’s Street, and a beautiful house, which he calls ‘my box,’ at Edgware. He drives splendid horses, has the best cook that money can hire, gives charming dinners, and always has an opera-box at the disposal of the wives and daughters of his friends. Mr. Floater was admitted as a solicitor, but he never practised. He did a little on the turf, made a few thousands, and gave up betting. He then went into the benevolent

line. If a young gentleman got into difficulties, Mr. Floater was ever ready to help him with excellent advice and ready money. The advice was gratis, but the money had to be paid for by interest a little over the Bank of England minimum. But this business does not pay so well as the public supposes. The swell money-lender sometimes catches a Tartar; for there are borrowing sharks as well as lending sharks. Of late years, Mr. Floater has devoted his talents to promoting. He gets up limited liability companies, though his native modesty prevents his name appearing in any of the transactions. For his share of the work he takes money when he can get it, and when there is no cash he accepts paid-up shares. Prudent man is Mr. Floater. All his shares are registered in the name of an old servant, who, owing to delicate health, is obliged to reside on the Continent. Mr. Floater became a favourite with Mrs. Gummer. He was so kind and attentive. He sent bouquets to the girls, and presented Mrs. Gummer with an elegant cameo brooch. I was startled when Matilda asked me to take a thousand shares in The Manitoulin Diamond Fields and Gold Quartz Crushing Company (Limited).

‘Only ten shillings a share to pay down, and no calls beyond another ten shillings; and in a year’s time the five-pound shares will be worth fifty pound.’

I had seen too much of limited liability to be nobbled in that style. Matilda was very angry at my point-blank refusal.

‘Where is your spirit, Gummer, and where is your

duty to your poor dear family? Here is Mr. Floater, who has nothing to gain by it, offers to well-nigh double our fortune for a paltry ten shillings a share, and you fly in the face of Providence and kick fifty thousand pounds into somebody's lap who has the feelings that a father of a family ought to have, if he is one.'

I was so pestered about The Manitoulin Company (Limited), that I spoke to Mr. Floater. I told him that I would not incur any liability, but I would take fifty fully paid-up shares, if there were any to be had. Mr. Floater accommodated me. Samuel Stanley Sutherland, Esq.—who, I afterwards learnt, was Mr. Floater's late servant—sold me fifty shares at par. Six months afterwards I wanted to sell, but could not find a purchaser; and in nine months The Manitoulin Diamond Fields and Gold Quartz Crushing Company (Limited) was wound up in Chancery, and the shareholders who could pay had to meet a call of three pounds per share. I lost two hundred and fifty pounds, and many families were beggared. Mrs. Gummer was very vexed about our loss, though it was only two hundred and fifty, and she so bothered me about it that instead of telling her it was her fault, I tried to console her by suggesting that it might have been much worse.

'Really, Gummer, my temper can't stand your temper scratching with briny nails. Do I deny that if you were a stone-blind idiot, that unhung thief Floater might have brought us down to a back garret? But if a man

has broken his leg, and is suffering tortures, what comfort is it to tell him that he might have broken his neck ?

Among the first batch of acquaintances who called on me after my coming into the fortune was Mr. Jordun O'Staapler, a gentleman of the press. I had known Mr. Jordun O'Staapler for years, and had frequently made out writs against him. He represented himself as an unappreciated genius. Editors did not like his articles. Publishers declined his books. Managers would not so much as read his plays. But O'Staapler never lost faith in his literary capacity. When he was reproached for getting into debt, he replied that he devoted his talents to the service of the public, and he had a right to live upon the public. Moreover, O'Staapler was always on the eve of making a great fortune.

He proposed that I should start a newspaper, of which he was to be the editor at a nominal salary. He assured me that £500 would be ample capital, and, indeed, more than was necessary. All the expenses would be paid by the advertisements. His estimate was so nicely prepared, and his explanations were so plausible, that I agreed to supply the capital for the *Universal Regenerator and Modern Babylon Advertiser*. Mrs. Gummer was to have the boxes at the opera, the boxes at the theatres, and the presents sent to the editor. I was to be the director of the paper, and Jordun O'Staapler was to be the working editor.

This was weak of me, I know ; but, then, it was a

human weakness. Every man thinks he is capable of being a Prime Minister, a Foreign Secretary, a Chancellor of the Exchequer, an Adonis with the ladies, and an Editor.

A fortnight after I consented to the scheme, the *Universal Regenerator and Modern Babylon Advertiser* appeared. But what a fortnight of misery and excitement I endured. O'Staapler introduced me to a score of unappreciated geniuses, and I had to treat these gentlemen, who drank like feverish fish, at all hours in the day, besides giving very wet dinners to O'Staapler's intimates. O'Staapler, who had charge of the petty cash, smoked the finest cigars and saturated his body with fours of whisky cold, except during the early hours of the morning, when he drank bitter beer as a pick-up.

There were disappointments even before the paper appeared. Our advertisement canvasser, who was certain that he could fill up four pages, signally failed. Advertisers, he said, would not go in until they had seen the paper. So we had to start with a couple of pages of dummies—that is, advertisements copied from other papers. The theatres declined to put us on the free-list. I proposed to pay.

'Never,' said O'Staapler, 'will I submit to such an imposition. Pay! What for? To fill the pockets of dramatists, actors, and managers? It is all humbug for the critic of a weekly to go to the theatre. I shall just look into the dailies, and make mincemeat of the pieces and the actors. The managers will be civil enough to us before long.'

The publishers did not send us their new books, though we condescended to apply for them.

‘So much the better,’ said O’Staapler; ‘it will save us the trouble of cutting the leaves. I am well up in literature, Mr. Gummer, and you will find that I can slate the trash without so much as seeing the covers of the books. After a week or two, the publishers will be down with their advertisements and books.’

Six numbers of the paper appeared. Nobody bought it. Nobody advertised in it, except some quack medicine-dealers, at a shilling for half a column, upon which the canvasser took a commission of twenty-five per cent., and omitted to hand over the balance. The theatres ignored us, and so did the publishers. I might have gone on with the speculation had not the Colonel interfered, and other matters claimed my attention. Besides, Jordun O’Staapler was unpleasantly familiar. He had borrowed nearly £100 in the six weeks, and I offered him the copyright of the paper; but that he would not accept, and threatened to sue me for a year’s salary. When *The Universal Regenerator and Modern Babylon Advertiser* ceased to appear, he wrote me a letter in which he bemoaned my folly in throwing away £5000 a-year, and my wickedness in spoiling his scheme. By the time all the bills were paid I had lost £900 by my venture in journalism.



‘Mr. O’Staapler may be a genius,’ said Mrs.

Gummer, 'for his clothes are never brushed; he always wants a loan till he sees you next time; his hair has not been cut for years; and he seems to think he has a right to other people's money. But, genius or no genius, a party who is thirsting for nips of spirit and water all day long will never make a paper or anything else pay. A morning, noon, and night drinker is no better than a sleep-walker half awake, though Jordun O'Staapler, with his half awake, could plunder the father of a family who, being so awfully shortsighted that he could not see the biggest wen on his own nose, ought to wear spectacles.

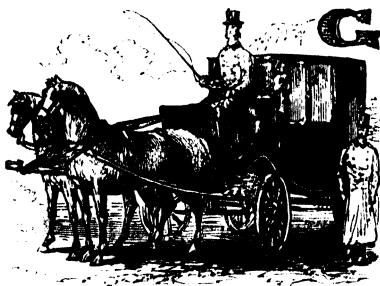


Mr. O'Staspler proposed that I should start a newspaper.

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CHAPTER XVI.

BARON INCOGNITOFF.



GUMMER, if there is anything that makes every inch of one's body feel in eider-down, and beautiful, this is it.'

It was the first ride in our carriage, built

by a crack builder, on the recommendation of Colonel de Crespin. The figure of the bill was perhaps heavy, but the vehicle was not dear; for, as Mrs. Gummer remarked, 'the painting is far finer than any of the pictures at Hampton Court, the linings are fit for a palace, and the springs would go over the moon itself without a jolt.' The harness was silver-plated. The magnificent cattle—swells always call carriage-horses cattle—were hired, by the advice of Colonel de Crespin, who thought it a safer plan than buying. The coachman, selected by Colonel de

Crespin, and our James, were in new and handsome liveries, which Mrs. Gummer warned them to take care of, and never to wear indoors.

The first drive in one's carriage is a real pleasure. Keeping a carriage puts one above the millions who don't, and is a certificate of social importance. It is also a genuine comfort. You can go where you like, when you like, and stop out as long as you like, with nothing extra to pay. The only drawback to our perfect enjoyment was the fierce way in which the cattle were pulled up, and the awkwardness of James. He climbed up and down as if he had never done it before—as he had not.

‘That boy will tear his new livery, and be under the horses’ feet; and we shall have to pension his mother.’

Mrs. Gummer jerked the check-string, and told James to mind what he was about, and to practise getting up and down when the horses were out of the carriage and he was in his undress livery.

After that admonition, Matilda became placid and leant back and for a moment shut her eyes.

‘Tom, swan’s down is bristles to the softness of these cushions. People may run down keeping your own carriage, but as poor pa used to say, those who sleep on the bed of luxury wouldn’t like second-class flock and third class straw. Lor’ dear me, Tom, how people are staring. Do they take us for royalty?’

Then Matilda sat upright, turned her smiling face to the window, and began to bow gracefully.

‘It may be absurd, Gummer, but I feel like a Royal

Highness, and I must act according to my feeling. To see a man flying in the air would be absurd, but, Gummer, if you had the feeling of a bird and likewise wings, you would be a flyer.'

When we alighted at Ccreyra Villa, the girls met us under the portico.

'Who do you think is here?' asked Nancy.

'Old Sparkes, about the fortune,' said Mrs. Gummer.

'Old Sparkes, indeed!' said Janet. 'No. There is his card, pa, and he is in the drawing-room, and hopes you will favour him for two minutes.'

'Baron Incognitoff,' said I.

'That makes out my dream of birds of Paradise hopping on our lawn. I thought the nobility would soon be down upon us.'

'I don't know Baron Incognitoff.'

'Perhaps not, Gummer. Perhaps we don't know any of the nobility; but now we are in their sphere, riding in the finest carriage that money can buy, and looking out for a seat in the country, the nobility will know us and we shall know them.'

'His brougham is walking up and down. It's such a dear little thing, with swell servants,' said Janet.

'Don't keep him waiting,' said Nancy.

'We will see him together, Tom, though I hardly feel up to facing a noble after our drive.'

When we entered the drawing-room, a tall, military-looking gentleman, with a carefully-shaved face and a wonderfully-trained moustache, rose from the settee

and bowed, as if he were trying to touch his toes with the tips of his fingers.

‘I presume I have the pleasure and the honour to greet Mr. Thomas Gummer and his estimable lady. Presume! Nay, it is certain. My old friend lives in that face and form. Pardon me, sir. Forgive me, madam. But what is here’—(the Count gently tapped his left collar-bone)—‘will compel the tongue to speak. Forgive the emotion. The last time I saw him he was alive, and now my old friend, my second father, is gone, gone, gone, and these eyes, dimmed with the dew of a wounded and weeping heart, will never again behold him beneath the starlit sky.’

The gentleman put one richly-jewelled hand to his forehead, and with the other hand he gently applied some exquisite cambric to the tip of his nose.

‘Lor, my lord, I am sorry to see you so cut down. But as I said to Mr. G., when our tabby, who, like all good mousers, was a great thief, mangled our canary, fretting over a half-eaten bird won’t make it chirp and sing again.’

‘A beautiful thought, madam. But the likeness overcame me. When I look upon your husband I see my old friend in the pride and glory of his manhood. I forget. You do not know me. I am the old, the bosom friend, the son-in-love and the brother-in-love of your cousin, Joseph Gummer. Here is the last letter he wrote to me.’

‘Please to be seated,’ said I, taking a letter from the Baron.

‘An old friend of the late Joseph. But you are young to be an old friend,’ said Mrs. Gummer.

‘True, madam, this is only the thirty-fourth summer that has smiled upon my birth, but I have known your dear cousin since I was ten years old. Perhaps, Mr. Gummer, you can’t read the letter. We always spoke and corresponded in Hindustani. Ah, madam, it is a magnificent tongue. It is the language of the torrid sun and of the gorgeous plumage of the torrid birds. But if, Mr. Gummer, you turn over the page, you can read the signature and the postscript.’

‘Joseph Gummer. P.S.—I enclose sight draft for the turtle soup,’ said I, reading from the letter.

‘It is the turtle soup that brings me here. I hope you will pardon the intrusion.’

‘Don’t talk of being an intruder,’ said Matilda. ‘Of course, we have swarms of nobility visitors in our position, but you are quite welcome.’

‘Your cousin, Mr. Gummer, was, like most eminent men, distinguished by one or two peculiarities. One was to have a plate of turtle soup with iced punch for his lunch; and I well remember his letter to the Nizam of Bungaboo, recommending it as a diet that acted as an antidote to the climate. In the letter you hold—most precious, because the last he wrote to me on earth—he directs me to send him two hundred pounds’ worth of hermetically-sealed turtle soup from England, and he enclosed me a draft for the money, for he was so precise in his money affairs. I arose one morning with the intention of going into the City to order the

soup, when I got the sad news that my revered friend would never again in this world eat turtle soup and drink iced punch.'

'It is hard to be cut off from enjoying what you have worked for and paid for,' said Matilda.

'But the soup was not paid for, and that has brought me here. The two hundred pounds will not appear in the books of your late relative, and, therefore, I discharge the debt of honour by handing you the money, for my old and bosom friend often told me you were to be his heir.'

From a beautiful morocco pocket-book, with a glittering clasp, the Baron took out twenty ten-pound notes, and gave them to me. I was rather taken by surprise. At first I had looked upon the Baron with some degree of suspicion. But there were the bank-notes. I hesitated for a moment about accepting them, but the Baron, with great dignity, and also kindness, told me that the money was not his, but mine. We were all deeply impressed with the honourable proceeding of the Baron, and even Mr. Sparkes, who does not think particularly well of anybody, said he must be a thoroughly honest fellow.

The Baron soon became our very intimate friend. He is the son of an English lady, who married a Russian baron. His father died when he was a child, and his mother did not long survive her husband. A fraudulent trustee robbed the orphan of the little property left by his parents, and at the age of ten he found himself in Calcutta as an office-boy. He became

acquainted with my cousin, who paid for his education, put him into the army, and soon obtained for him an appointment as confidential secretary to the Nizam of Bungbaboo. My cousin used to say to him : ' Mind you, Rudolf, I have given you a start, and treated you like a son. But you will not be my heir. When I die all I am possessed of will go to my cousin, Thomas. Whilst I live my money is my own ; when I die it will belong to my dear relation.' The Baron did not need even a legacy. The Nizam of Bungbaboo was prodigiously rich, and, besides other presents, gave the Baron five lacs of rupees at parting. With that money he hastened to Europe and bought back the paternal estate in Russia.

' It was not a profitable investment,' said the Baron, ' but it was a duty ; and when I meet my father in another world, he will thank me for taking the Incognitoff estate—given to our ancestor by Peter the Great—out of the hands of strangers.'

The Emperor of Russia was so pleased with the Baron's filial piety, and heard such accounts of his diplomatic skill, that he appointed him his secret diplomatic agent.

In less than a month Baron Incognitoff had become indispensable to us. He told no end of anecdotes about the Sultan of Turkey, the Emperor of Russia, and the Nizam of Bungbaboo. He took the girls here, there, and everywhere. He found a charming residential estate in Kent for £80,000. He arranged the whole business. I paid £10,000 down, and the balance

was to be paid in a year. He suggested the plan by which I borrowed £15,000 through the agency of Mr. Sparkes.

At first the De Crespins did not like the Baron, but he lost a little money to the Colonel at whist, gave a Bungbaboo silver drinking-cup to Mrs. De Crespin, and Bungbaboo shawls to the Misses De Crespin, and they began to like him. Moreover, he paid marked attention to Nancy, and studiously avoided any marked attention to Janet, to whom young De Crespin was conspicuously devoted.

Judge of our dismay when, after a family dinner, the Baron announced that he should have to return to Russia and remain there six or nine months.

‘That is very bad news for me, Baron,’ said I, ‘for what with the estate and other things to arrange, I don’t know how I shall get on without you.’

Janet said she was very sorry. Nancy was silent, and did not seem deeply affected.

‘And, if I were you, Baron,’ said Mrs. Gummer, ‘I wouldn’t transport myself to foreign parts to please fifty emperors.’

‘The Emperor, my august master, is not responsible for my movements, and I happen to know that his Imperial Majesty would prefer my remaining in England.’

‘Then why are you going?’

‘You shall have a frank answer to your frank question, my dear Mrs. Gummer, for, though a diplomatist, I love candour, and I wish that the sky roofed a

Palace of Truth. The purchase of the Incognitoff estate cost me all my fortune. I have given my serfs a year to recover from the grinding oppression of the late proprietors, and I shall take no rents for nine months. My ready money has nearly gone, and I must live on the paternal acres until I get my rents. Then I shall come back to England, and I hope I shall not be forgotten.'

He looked lovingly at Nancy, who was sprinkling some sugar over her strawberries. As Mrs. Gummer afterwards remarked, Nancy seemed like a stone.

'Nonsense, Baron; you can have what you want from me.'

'Of course you can, Baron,' said Mrs. Gummer. 'The idea of thinking of transportation for the sake of the paltry few hundreds that it costs a single man to live for a few months, and this being your home as often as you like, and the oftener the better.'

'Thank you, from my heart, dear Mr. Gummer, but I have a mortal aversion to dipping my hand into the pocket of a friend. And, my dear Mrs. Gummer, to one who has lived for years in the palace of Bungbaboo, only second to the Nizam, a few hundreds do not go far. Besides, if I do not go to Russia I must send money, and without I can get £10,000 I shall have to depart. I have jewels valued in Paris at £16,000. They are the gifts of the Nizam and other friends, and I will not sell them, and I hope some day that they will be worn by the lady who accepts my hand and heart.'

He again looked lovingly at Nancy ; she coloured a little, but did not speak.

‘ By the way, *mon cher* Gummer, do English bankers advance on jewels ? If so, the business may be managed, and I can remain in England.’

‘ I do not think so, Baron. But there are——’ here I hesitated, for the word pawnbroker is so vulgar—‘ persons who lend to any amount on jewels.’

‘ And, Gummer, you, knowing what those lenders are, and that putting things in a pawnbroker’s is like dropping joints into a lion’s den, or if they do come out again it is not till they have eaten their heads off with interest, for times out of number have I told you how my poor dear pa——’

Janet interrupted her mamma with a scream.

‘ My dear, what is the matter ?’

‘ Nothing, ma. I thought I saw a blackbeetle on your dress.’

Then Mrs. Gummer screamed.

‘ Where, where, where ? Take it off. Oh, I have such a horror of them !’

Janet went to her mamma, and after whispering, ‘ What were you thinking of, to talk of grandpapa’s pawning ?’ said aloud :

‘ Ma, it was a fold of your dress.’

And then the Baron told us how, at Bungbaboo, when it was exceeding hot, the Nizam’s wives used to cool themselves by having a dozen black-beetles crawling about them.

Mrs. Gummer shrieked.

‘To be sure, Baron, the very thought of it makes one cold. But don’t they bite?’

‘My dear Mrs. Gummer, the ingenuity of Oriental slaves is marvellous. At Bungbaboo Palace there were three slaves called the black-beetlers, and they had nothing to do but to fatten the finest specimens, and to seal up their mouths before the things were used as lady coolers.’

‘Then, Baron, I am disgusted with the Nizamesses. We can’t all open our infant eyes in England, and poor foreigners can’t help the climate to which they are born, but they can help cooling themselves with creeping reptiles. But, as I was saying, Baron, my poor dear pa knew a party who was a regular pawner. He pawned everything that would be taken in, and his poor dear wife, who in pawning went by the name of Mrs. Ann Sprat, seldom missed a day in going to George’s, as she used to call all those places. Most of the things were lost for not a fourth of their value. Others cost an income, because they were always going in and out. Others took a fortune in interest, and never came out at last. There was a silver mug, five silver tea-spoons, two silver salts, and a pair of silver sauce ladles, that cost the party I speak of five times their worth in interest, and they were lost.’

‘Thank you, my dear Mrs. Gummer. I could not trust my jewels except to a banker. And, I may add, only to an English banker.’

‘Of course not. And, Gummer, you might ask your

Orey, Comus, and Co. to do it for the Baron. You trust them with your money, which I wouldn't do so long as there was a Bank of England, or an iron safe with a double patent lock. And Orey, Comus, and Co., knowing who you are, and what you are, will turn a "no" over in their mind a good many times before they say it to you.'

I had been introduced to Orey, Comus, and Co. by Purrem and Mangles. It is a magnificent firm, with princes and lords amongst its customers. There was no Orey in the firm, as the Orey had been made a peer, but continued to be a sleeping partner. Sir Joseph Comus was a prodigious grandee. He was M.P. for an intensely respectable borough. He had a place in his county, a shooting-box in Scotland, and an establishment in Portland Place. Yet I was received by Sir Joseph instead of by one of the Co. He shook hands with me, and having inquired about my health, he asked what he could do for me. Sir Joseph Comus, M.P., asking Joseph Gummer what he could do for him! Never since the fortune came had I felt so big. •

I told him that a friend of mine, a gentleman who had been an intimate friend of my late cousin, Baron Incognitoff, wanted to borrow £10,000.

'Incognitoff. A Russ, I suppose, Mr. Gummer?'

'Yes, Sir Joseph. His mother was an English lady, and he has been nearly all his life in India.'

'What security?'

'Jewels.'

'Family jewels?'

‘No ; gifts of the Nizam of Bungaboo. He wants the money for six or nine months.’

‘It is a sort of business we do not care about, even for our customers. But we will not refuse your friend. Let him bring the jewels to our Mr. Goar, and they shall be valued. If there is sufficient margin he shall have the money. I would wager that your uncle has not left much of his money in jewels. Men of business who have made a fortune do not favour that sort of investment. A dead loss in interest, besides the principal being of uncertain value. If Lady Comus would consent to wear Paris paste we should save a little fortune in twenty years.’

It was curious that such a grandee as Sir Joseph Comus should give a thought to the loss of interest on his wife’s jewels. But the Comuses have always been a money-making and a saving race.

‘It is according to human nature,’ said Mrs. Gummer, when I told her of it. ‘It is the poor who know the want of money, and it is the rich who know the value of money. The poor waste the little they ought to hoard, and the rich groan over the outgoings that they can afford. It’s no use talking, for breath long or short won’t make human nature straight when it is awry. If you spoke volumes, a slice of bread and butter would still fall with the greasy side on the carpet. Moreover, what we call being awry may be no more so than the round-about zigzag wheels which work a machine. I dare say if we had been the designers of our hands all our fingers, including the thumb, would

have been straight and equal in length, but the equality would have made the hand pretty useless. The fact is, Tom, if the poor were not spend-all, and the rich save-all, as far as they can, there would be no rich, no luxury, and no beautiful things that cost a lot of money. It would be a flat world, Tom, if we were all on a par, and we should all be dull and level as paving-stones if some did not keep poor by wasting and others get rich by saving.'

The Baron left his jewels with Mr. Goar, and at the end of a week we called at the bank. I again had the honour of being received by Sir Joseph Comus. I was very proud of having to introduce Baron Incognitoff to the banking Baronet.

'Baron, we wished to advance you the £10,000 at the request of Mr. Gummer, but we cannot do so. The valuation is just over £10,000. We must have a margin of 30 per cent. We can offer you a loan of £7000 at 5 per cent. on the jewels.'

'It is good of you, Sir Joseph, but a cannon that will not hit your mark is no more use than a popgun. I want £10,000, and in Paris the jewels were valued at £16,000.'

'Sorry we can't meet with your views. But you see, Baron, we must take our valuer's valuation.'

Sir Joseph touched a bell, and spoke through a pipe. In two or three minutes Mr. Goar came into the room with the jewel case in his hand.

'Baron Incognitoff cannot do with the £7000. Will you hand him the jewels?'

The Baron took the case from Mr. Goar and opened it. The glitter of the gems seemed to light up the room.

‘Minum, our valuer,’ remarked Mr. Goar, ‘says that the stones are exquisite, but badly set.’

‘They were set by a clumsy jeweller patronised by the Nizam of Bungaboo,’ said the Baron closing the case and putting it in his pocket.

The Baron put his hand on my arm and led me to a corner of the room.

‘Gummer, I don’t want to go to Russia, if I can help it, for many reasons : one of which, if I don’t go, I must soon explain to you. If you like to lend me £3000 for six months, you can have a lien on the jewels, which, as you hear, are worth more than £10,000, according to a ridiculously low valuation, or you can have some of the Incognitoff estate parchments. Do as you like, and do not put yourself to the least inconvenience.’

‘Of course you can have the £3000 from me. I will make up the advance you want on the jewels.’

‘Sir Joseph,’ said the Baron, ‘I can take the £7000. My friend Gummer will make up the advance to £10,000, with a lien on the jewels, and, if he likes, some of my parchments.’

‘Very well,’ replied Sir Joseph ; ‘but Mr. Gummer will understand that we have nothing to do with his lien except that, in the event of a sale, we will act on your order, and pay over to Mr. Gummer any sum,

not exceeding £3000, out of any surplus that may remain after the satisfaction of our claim.'

'Precisely,' said the Baron, smiling; 'but if I meant to sell, I should not borrow.'



He gave back the case to Mr. Goar. That gentleman left the room and returned immediately with a paper for the Baron's signature, and with a memorandum signed by the firm.

'I had these papers prepared on the presumption that you would conclude the business. Perhaps, Baron, you would like to tick off the jewels with the inventory.'

'I know every jewel, Mr. Goar,' said the Baron, glancing over the paper. 'Quite correct.'

The documents were signed, and the Baron received the £7000 in bank-notes. He put the notes into an envelope, and the envelope into his trousers pocket.

'I never confide in a cash-box or a pocket-book. It is like saying to a thief: "There is the property, collected and neatly packed."'

'Do you know Prince Atitup?' asked Sir Joseph. 'His father was ambassador in Paris.'

'Yes. The Prince lost a travelling-case, with a small fortune in it.'

'None of the money was recovered,' replied Sir Joseph.

'That is a misfortune that often happens to men who play for heavy stakes. Atitup was devoted to play and sometimes it is prudent to mask ruin by gambling.'

Three days afterwards I gave the Baron a cheque for £3000.

‘I hope that in less than six months the jewels will be worn by the Baroness Incognitoff. But that depends upon the will of one whom we both love dearly.’

I knew, of course, that he referred to Nancy. I mentioned this remark to Mrs. Gummer, and observed that I did not think Nancy was in love with the Baron.

‘Indeed! Then I don’t think your opinion is becoming a father. Do you suppose a young lady of Nancy’s schooling, bringing-up, and expectations, is to be a forward minx, offering herself to a man, leap-year or no leap-year? Or do you think she is going to set her mind on a fish that is not landed? Moreover, it is not the forward spider that catches the finest fly.’

‘Well, Matilda, I like the Baron, and I hope you are right about Nancy.’

‘You will soon know if I am right. And fancy what my feelings will be when the papers announce that I am the mother of a Baroness. But, Tom, one soon gets used to being grand, which is not the case with being down in the world. I begin to think that I should be at home with the Queen herself wearing all the Tower jewels and on her throne, which is not very high according to what you showed me in the House of Lords.’

CHAPTER XVII.

OLD BLOOD AND NEW MONEY.

THE De Crespins are about the most ancient family on the face of the earth. They are regular cob-webbed and old crusted humanity, the De Crespin blood having been in bottle, or rather in skin, and in a manner of speaking laid down for over a thousand years. They are not heavy in their style. Their carriage is a roomy brougham drawn by a bony pair. Their livery is chocolate and faded yellow. Their place, Grammont Lodge, is not extensive, but the walls are very thick and high. The De Crespins lived in the Green Lanes when Grammont Lodge was the only house for miles round. Colonel De Crespin has a limited income for the support of his family, which consists of himself, wife, two daughters, and a son. Though not rich the De Crespins are genuine aristocrats, and rather boast of their £2000 a year poverty. The De Crespins have been presented at Court ever since there has been a Court, and every year the papers inform the world

that Colonel De Crespin has attended the Levée. The De Crespins are highly connected. One of their cousins is a baronet, who is M.P. for his county, and has twice refused a peerage. Another first cousin is married to a lord who is the heir presumptive to a dukedom. Of course, the De Crespins do not mingle with the Green Lanes gentility. They are gracious to the rector and polite to the doctor. They do not know their tradesmen, and they are benevolently civil to the working class. But between the De Crespins and the Green Lanes gentility there is an awful and unmeltable barrier of ice.

‘I hate those Crespins,’ Mrs. Gummer used to say, ‘with their craned necks and crooked noses, going about as if they were the only people on the earth.’

But when we came into our fortune the De Crespins became as friendly as if the Gummers had immigrated with Julius Cæsar, and had lived in a castle for a thousand years without earning a morsel of their bread. As I have mentioned, Colonel De Crespin made me a judge of flowers and Mrs. De Crespin and the Misses De Crespin left cards. The family shook hands with us in the church porch, and the Misses De Crespin kissed the Misses Gummer to the amazement of the Green Laners.

‘Tom,’ said Matilda, ‘if a daisy had sense it wouldn’t find fault with a rose for not cutting its tree and growing on the ground, so as to be hail-fellow-well-met with flowers that don’t grow on trees. We were

wrong, to be sure, about the De Crespins, for they are not stiff-necked giraffes weaned on starch and reared on glue, but pleasant people as ever wore stockings. There is none of your fal-de-ral-hee-haw fiddle-faddle about them. Instead of hoping the young ladies are well, as Mrs. Bungay does, Mrs. De Crespin asks after the girls. Tom, she's a mother and a woman, although she was born in a sphere that never sees a kitchen, or knows how the fruit gets into a pudding, or how to sew on a button, much less fronting a shirt.'

The Colonel called and invited us to dine at Grammont Lodge, and we were the first Green Laners ever so honoured.

'Nothing formal, and dinner at sharp seven.'

Mrs. Gummer and the girls were delighted; especially Janet, who, somehow or other, persuaded herself that she was in love with Max De Crespin.

'Gummer, depend upon it that when my judgment takes a shot, the bull's-eye is pretty sure to be hit. If you can't see through the invite I can. That young Max De Crespin is sweet as honey on Janet, and eyes her like a thirsty fox does a bunch of grapes. Of course, Max isn't a baron, and Janet might look for a title, but there are titles in the family, and I look upon a De Crespin as the equal of any lord. But, Tom, now I am put to it I feel in a shake at dining with such quality. But if one's girls are to marry at the tip-top of the tree, we must perch on the top bough, though we may be awkward at the climbing to which we were not brought up.'

The invitation caused us much trouble and worry. As it was a family-party, ought we to go in full dress? On the advice of a West-end milliner, full dress was determined on, who said that in society people always full-dressed for dinner. Mrs. Gummer was persuaded to leave off her cap, and to wear a low body.

‘Not, Tom, that I fancy it at my years; but if I look middling juvenile it makes the girls seem more teenish, and the younger girls look the more attractive they are to the taste of man which prefers the showy blossom to the grown fruit.’

For a whole week we thought and talked of nothing but the dinner-party. We learnt the ‘Etiquette of the Dinner Table’ by heart; but that book is of very little use, for the host and hostess did nothing it said they would do. On the grand day we dined early—that is to say, we lunched at one o’clock; and at four o’clock the labour of dressing began. A hairdresser from Bond Street, specially retained, arrived in a cab, and operated for nearly two hours on the head of Mrs. Gummer; and, certainly, the effect was surprising. What with the headdressing of the Bond Street artist, and the powder and rouge put on by the young person who was sent with the things from the milliner’s, Matilda looked blooming as a thirty-year-old, and aristocratic as an empress.

‘Tom,’ said Mrs. Gummer, looking in the glass, ‘if I were put on my oath I should not like to swear I am not somebody else. A bird may be old, but if it is fresh-feathered it looks equal to new-fledged. Depend

upon it, Tom, these West-end dressers could turn, twist, and twiddle a woman of ninety into a long-clothes baby.'

On our way to Grammont Lodge we agreed to do as the others did. I was to follow the example of the Colonel, Mrs. Gummer was to imitate Mrs. De Crespin, and the girls were to take copy of the Misses De Crespin. Though we did not say so, we all of us wished that the party was over.



At first we were as uncomfortable as I suppose fish would be in warm water. Although Mrs. Gummer was a long way off, I could see that the soup was a trial to her. I defy anyone who is not used to it to take soup ele-

gantly ; and, to a nervous person, it is torture. We had practised at soup twice a day since the invitation, but we were not perfect ; and I say that it would be more comfortable and elegant to drink the soup out of breakfast cups instead of spooning it. But the Colonel and his wife were so jolly that, after a glass or two of wine, we were much more at our ease ; and before the dinner was over Matilda was talking freely. Mrs. De Crespin told me that Mrs. Gummer was a dear, good creature, that Nancy was a noble girl, and that Janet was a sweet pet. So the dreaded dinner-

party went off as well as we could desire ; and we were home before twelve o'clock, quite content with our behaviour and forgetting all about the soup difficulty. We did not go to bed, but sat down to talk over the party.

Nancy thought the Misses De Crespin were too free-and-easy in their manner. Janet told Nancy that she was a fool to suppose that real bred-and-born ladies would behave as if they were crabby old cats at a cup-of-tea party. Nancy said that a lady was not obliged to talk in a way that was not proper. Janet went off like ginger-beer in July, and observed that some people were always thinking evil of others, and perhaps they had better look at home. For her part she did not think much of Russian manners, even if the person happened to be a baron. A quarrel, and quarrels were common since we had come into a fortune, was at hand ; and, by way of a stopper, I asked what they thought of young Mr. De Crespin, and the reply was :

‘What do you think of him?’

‘Not to be compared to the Colonel. If his conceit and brains were put into scales to be weighed one against the other, the conceit scale would go down with a bang.’

Janet pouted and sneered, and remarked that commoners could not understand aristocracy. Nancy admitted he was proud, but pleaded that pride was the fault of his education. Mrs. Gummer said it was stupid to suppose that as fine a blood-horse as was ever shod would not show his breed and his feed ;

and that if the Emperor of Russia, with his crown on his head, was to pay attention to the poor dear girls, their pa would take a pleasure in grinding them down into dust and ashes by calling the Emperor bad names.'

Evidently what my father called a tread-corn and kick-bunion duel with hysteria to follow, was coming on ; and so Nancy, who is a peacemaker, took Janet to bed. Janet was very indignant, and instead of kissing me, offered me her cheek.

'Perhaps, Gummer, if the poor dear girls were dissected before your eyes you might believe they had hearts in their bosoms, and not beating stones. What will be will be ; and it is not for a man and a father to be sowing domestic jars, which will grow fast enough before they are wanted.'

'Really, Matilda, if opening my mouth leads to this bother, I will keep it shut.'

'Tom, your temper is getting that bad that it will bring me to my grave ; and when I am gone, Gummer, your fortune and your sorrowing won't bring me back again.'

Mrs. Gummer mixed my grog, but not any anti-spasms medicine for herself.

'Take a little, Matilda ; it will settle the wine.'

'Not to-night, Gummer ; at least it must only be enough to swear by, for if you were to guess for a month of Sundays, you would never hit upon what happened in Mrs. De Crespin's dressing-room.'

I took a long whiff at my pipe, and shook my head.

'Gummer, what we know is wonderful, but what we

don't know is double wonderful. Before I could put on my hood and cloak, Mrs. De Crespin asked me whether I patronised night-caps.'

' "Yes, mum, for it is untidy to have one's hair tangled like a hundred skeins of silk used without winding, and nets don't keep the grease from the pillow-case."

' With that Mrs. C. laughed at me as if I was a pantomime.

' "My dear, forgive the laugh. I did not refer to night-caps for the head, but for the stomach. I meant do you take a little something before going to bed?"

' In walked her maid with a tiny kettle of boiling water, and set it on the stove, two tumblers, spoons, lemon, and sugar on the table, and a bottle from the cupboard—a downright public-house bottle of Old Tom.

' "If you prefer any other night-cap, say so, and Fanny will fetch it."

' Well, Tom, I took a little, and Mrs. C. mixed for herself. Not an inch of emptiness in her tumbler, and it was fair half-and-half. It went down with no sipping and no gasping. Now, Gummer, who would have thought that a genuine born lady—an aristocrat of high breed—would let her lips come within a mile of gin-and-water ?

' Well, my dear, there is no harm in it.'

' I did not insinuate harm, Gummer. But there is no harm in Margate oysters, or black puddings, or liver and bacon : but it is not aristocratic food, any more

than champagne is drink for common people—which, between ourselves, is no better than ginger-beer without the ginger. And never mind about the mother or her nightcaps. You may run down the son, but if he does not convert Janet Gummer into Mrs. Max De Crespín, I'll get a pound of Indian ink and be pricked fool on my forehead, so that all the world may see it.

Next day I was in town with my lawyer, and, returning in the afternoon, I met Matilda about fifty yards from our villa.

'There is nothing the matter, Gummer; but, when I say nothing, I mean something, but it is not bad. And I must say, Gummer, that though I may be set down for a fool, there are not many pairs of eyes that can see what isn't born, or maybe not thought of, much better than I can.'

'What is the good word, Matilda?'

'Tom,' said Mrs. Gummer, taking my arm, 'fortune-telling may be called vulgar, but I happen to know that it's patronised by the highest in the land behind a mask and on the sly. And, though I don't call cards wicked, like poor pa's Aunt Deborah, who did something dreadful that obliged her family to get her out of the country, and who was always saying and writing how thankful she was that she had never touched a card, still I don't go in for cards by daylight. But I see no harm in doing once in the way what I wouldn't do regular. Weak cold spirit-and-water is very good on a broiling day when the thermometer is over blood-

heat in an ice-well, but taken all the year round it is poison.'

'Well, Matilda, what is it all about?'

'I must say that for a man who pretends to be sweet-tempered as the picture of a smiling angel—which, of course, being a picture, cannot be put out—you snap at a wife in a way that some women would Probate and Divorce Court you for. I dare say those who are born and bred to the east wind don't notice it, but an east wind, even when it's a March bone-freezer, is due south and sunshine compared to a snapping husband. But I am nobody, being a slaving wife instead of a dressed-out doll. However, perhaps as a father you will leave off abusing me for a minute and just hear what I have to say.'

'Well, my dear,' said I.

If I had said more Matilda would have been interrupted. If I had been silent, Matilda would have accused me of grinding my teeth.

'As I was saying, Tom, when you jumped down my throat, this morning I gave the girls a shuffle of the cards, and wonderful cards they cut. There was a club man following a heart woman, with his personal thoughts at the house. Also, there were wedding cards on a journey. And, Tom, who do you think came to the house an hour ago?'

'The Baron.'

'Isn't the Baron in Paris, and didn't he write to say he would be with us in a day or two? No, Tom, it's young Mr. Max De Crespia, and I dare say our

nails won't want cutting often before the Baron comes on the same errand. We shall feel the parting, Tom, but, of course, girls are born to be parted with, and it is no use crying because one's child is not the nose on one's face.'

'And what does young De Crespin want?'

'You need not be so sharp and pull me up as if I was a pair of royal carriage-horses, for I am not an aggravating about-the-bush beater, but come at once to my bird in hand. And after the looks that young man shot at Janet last night, I should think you might have known that he has offered and is waiting to ask your consent.'

'He is in a ridiculous hurry. He might wait till he knew Janet and Janet knew him.'

'Gummer, don't give me a faint on the paving-stones. Is it for a father to play bob-cherry with the heart of his poor dear girl? Young De Crespin is not your taste, and it is not you who will have to live with him, and only a woman who has been ringed for long over twenty years knows what the tie is.'

Much more was said by Mrs. Gummer, but I was too upset to heed her or to reply. Nancy met me at the gate, and warned me to be cautious.

When I entered the drawing-room, there were Janet and Max De Crespin sitting on the couch. Janet blushed scarlet and left the room.

Young De Crespin was as cool as if I were a horse-dealer, and he had come to buy a horse; and his coolness nettled me.

‘I venture to hope, Mr. Gummer, that you have observed my affection for your dear and amiable daughter. I have presumed to offer her my hand, and I am happy to say that, with your consent, my offer will be accepted.’

Not a quiver in his voice, and I was almost choking. We had talked of offers, and sought for offers ; and now, when an offer came, it made me writhe with pain. Suddenly I was conscious that the years were gone, and that I was old. There sat the man who was to begin the pulling down of my home. He was to take my girl from me. I love both my girls, but Janet was always the pet. Now she was to love that stranger more than she loved me. A father watches over his child, and labours for her in the years that she cannot be grateful for his care. At length she grows to honour him, and to love him, and to be a blessing to him. And when she is most dear, most loving, and most needful, the stranger comes, takes her away, takes away the sunshine of the home and the joy that makes joyful the years of old age, and the father is left desolate. This is selfish, but all love is selfish ; and, save the love of son and mother, and of a loving wife and husband, what love is so pure, so deep, so strong as the love of a father for his girl ?

And I looked at the De Crespins playing with his watch, and staring vacantly at the pattern of the carpet, and I was angry that Janet could think of giving up her home and her father for such a man.

Not that there was anything unpleasant in his appearance, though he was hateful in my sight.

I told him, as politely as I could, that he had taken me by surprise, that I would speak to Janet, and send him an answer. He thanked me, shook hands, and departed.

I was awfully dull and evil-tempered at table ; and after dinner I took up a book and pretended to read. Janet was silent ; and Mrs. Gummer and Nancy talked in whispers, perhaps about the wedding. By-and-by, Janet came to me, and sat upon my knee, and put her arms about my neck. As she pressed closely to me, I felt the beating of her heart ; and when her cheek touched mine, it was burning hot and wet. And she whispered :

‘Pa, darling, if it hurts you ever so little I will give him up, and not care about it.’

And she kissed me, and a tear fell on my face. I bent my head over her, and held her to me as if she were again a baby, and I was lulling her to sleep. I whispered :

‘Darling, if he loves you, and you love him, it will not hurt me, but make me glad.’

I spoke the truth, for I felt how cruelly selfish I had been. Mrs. Gummer and Nancy left us, and I continued to nurse Janet as if she were a little child. Then we talked a little, and I was comforted. Janet might go from me, but the love of father and daughter is an everlasting love.

Later in the evening we were almost cheerful. Mrs.

Gummer and Nancy referred now and then to the event ; and when they did so, Janet looked fondly on me ; and her look was a pledge of a love that could never die or even grow less.

A note from the Colonel asked me to waive ceremony, and to call on him. He was in his snug library. Easy-chairs that fit every crease of the body, as if the sitters had been measured for them. Drinks on the table, a little oak cabinet of cigars, a tobacco jar, and fancy pipes for those who prefer cool smoke.

‘ It is a flagrant breach of social order for me not to have called on you ; but I thought we should be quiet here, and I know you are not a fanatical worshipper of that senseless and exacting idol, Etiquette.’

The Colonel filled a pipe for me, and lighted a cigar.

‘ So, Gummer, the young people want to connect you and me as fathers-in-law ?’

My pipe was out, and the Colonel lighted a spill of scented wood, and handed it to me. Smoking is convenient when you are bothered.

‘ Well, Gummer, I cannot object to Miss Janet, who is a most charming lassie ; and, from what I hear, she does not object to Max. What is your view ?’

I replied that Janet was a dear, good girl, that I only desired her happiness, and that if they loved each other they had my free consent to the marriage.

‘ We may take the love for granted ; and that being

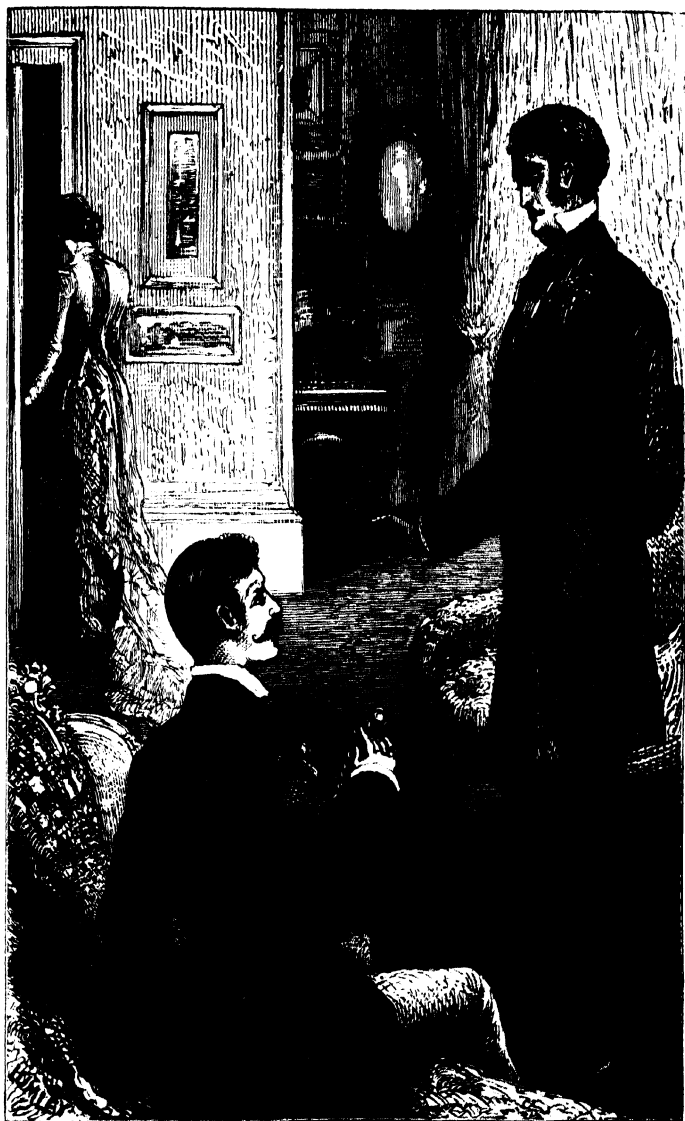
so, it is urgent for us to come to business. Love, my dear Gummer, is an ingredient in marriage, but there are other matters to be considered. With or without ante-nuptial love, most well-arranged marriages are happy. No matter how strong the ante-nuptial love, an ill-arranged marriage is sure to turn out badly.'

I said I did not believe in happiness without affection.

'Certainly not; and, in order that there may be continued affection, there must be adequate arrangements. Now, Gummer, we have to resolve ourselves into a committee of ways and means, and I shall be frank, but I trust not offensive.'

The Colonel replenished the glasses, and I refilled my pipe. I was not over-comfortable. I felt that I was in the power of the Colonel. I am a man of business, but that sort of look-down-upon-you coolness reduced me, as Matilda has since said, to a fiddle which would play any tune the fiddler chose.

'Now, Gummer, Max has no fortune. When I die, he will come into £1000 a year. Whilst I live, I can allow him £200 a year for cigars and tooth-picks. As all the world knows, I am poor. How can the younger branch of the oldest family in England be rich? The elder branch has the land, and we have the name only. What can we do? A De Crespin can't go into business, for he has no capital for great commerce or the *haute finance*, and shopkeeping is unfortunately impossible. Mind you, Gummer, we don't



Max De Crespín makes an offer.

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marry for money, but we can't marry without it. The question is, are you willing to take Max without a fortune? And, if so, what will you do for Miss Janet?

I replied that I had not thought of the details, but that Janet and her sister would divide all I was worth.

'My dear Gummer, in business there is nothing like precision and promptitude. It won't do for these young people to get attached if marriage is impossible. Will you permit me to state my views of what I think is right and necessary?'

I begged the Colonel to proceed.

'Shortly, then, my idea is: £50,000 settled on Miss Janet, with a life-interest to Max if he survives his wife, the principal to the children—if there are any; if there are no children, £25,000 to Max, and the balance to be at the disposal by will of Miss Janet. Besides the settlement, £5000 as a wedding gift. Sum total—£55,000. It may appear to you, Gummer, that £55,000 is an extravagant price for a skinful of De Crespian blood. So it is; but old blood, like a large diamond, is a fancy article, and there is no proportion between the utility value and the market value. However, the point is, that Max cannot marry a less fortune, and it is for you to say yea or nay. If you nay me I shall not be offended. I want Max to settle. I am charmed with your daughter. But, as a gentleman, I must not allow the young people to make an improvident marriage.'

I can't write the exact words spoken by the Colonel; and, if I could, the written words would not explain his manner. The Colonel was so easy and yet so decided, that I could hardly ask for a day to consider.

'Not a day, Gummer, but a week. These affairs are not to be settled off-hand. Drop me a line when you have duly weighed the *pros* and *cons*, and meantime it will be better for the young people not to meet.'

When I got home I could hardly bring myself to tell what the Colonel had said to me. I thought it would disgust them all and disappoint Janet. But Mrs. Gummer, instead of being vexed, seemed pleased with the Colonel's proposal.

'It is a big fortune, to be sure, but then we don't want the money, and if it had been double we should not have grudged it to our own flesh and blood. What is the sense of parents keeping all to themselves till they are dead, when they cannot see their children's enjoyment? It is better for a parent to probate his own will, and be his own executor.'

Janet vowed she would not take so much money from me, and was sure that Max did not care for money. Her opposition pleased me, but it also reconciled me to the De Crespín terms. A short note from Max—vowing he was in utter misery because the Colonel had forbidden him to visit Corcyra Villa until Mr. Gummer had resolved whether he (Max) was to be happy or wretched for life—gave Janet a dreadful

headache. I knew the cause and remedy. I did not wait a week, or even two days ; and Max and Janet were formally affianced without delay.

Farewell to domestic bliss when the daughter is engaged, and the young man comes a-courting. Love-making is mighty pleasant to lovers, but a nuisance, perhaps a sour-grapes nuisance, to other people. It is bad enough in public. You can always tell an engaged couple. The damsel looks so mightily self-contented, and with a simper and a sneer seems to say :

‘ My irresistible charms have triumphed. My lover, who is the best match on earth, loves me better than ever woman was loved since the world began. He trembles with delight when he touches my hand, and would not sell a glove that my hand has touched for all the riches of earth. Keep your distance, good people. We have nothing to do with you, and you have nothing to do with us, but to admire and be respectful.’

The young man puts on the strut of a great conqueror.* He does not reflect that to woo and win is the too common fate of fallen man, but thinks himself a superior being because a young woman has whispered ‘ Yes ’ in reply to his persuasion. I would rather travel in a cattle-truck with sheared sheep than in a royal saloon with an engaged couple. But courting at home, especially to the father, is a tormenting trial for the temper.

I am not jealous, but I was galled at the way in which the women raved about Max. Though not ugly he is

not particularly good-looking, yet there was no end of exclamations about his beauty. His large, crooked nose was 'so handsome and so aristocratic.' His legs were 'so long and so aristocratic.' His feet and hands were 'so small and so aristocratic.' His whitey-green eyes were 'such a celestial blue, and so expressive.' His teeth, his nails, his hair, and his eyebrows were befooled in like manner. His dress displayed such exquisite taste, and his manners were perfection—'so polished and so aristocratic.' Then Max was so clever. If I disagreed with him, Mrs. Gummer and the girls talked at me, and jeered at me ; and I had to give in, though I was right and Max was wrong.

As the marriage was to take place as soon as the arrangements could be completed, the young people met every evening.

'It was not strict etiquette,' said the Colonel. But he added that he did not care for etiquette. Perhaps not when £55,000 was to be landed by special licence.

Two evenings a week Janet went to Grammont Lodge ; and then, at ten o'clock—wet or fine, cold or genial—I had to turn out and fetch her home. Five evenings a week Max was at Corcyra Villa, and those evenings were dreadful.

We dined at six o'clock. Max arrived at half-past seven. All the while we were dining, Janet was fidgeting to get to her room, so that she might have time to put on extra finish before Max came. The conversation at dinner was about the De Crespins ; about what they had said, what they had done, and

what they were going to do. If I spoke of the news of the day, no one answered me. I believe if I had told them that the Emperor of Russia had been smuggled through the Custom House in a cask of tallow, and that he had blown up the Parliament and hanged the Lord Mayor, they would not have made a remark about the event, but have gone on talking about the colour of the ribbon on Miss De Crespin's bonnet. I was not allowed to smoke after dinner, because it is so vulgar to come into the drawing-room smelling of tobacco. Clay pipes were forbidden, and I had to take to meerschauums, which are not fit to smoke until they want cleaning, and I cannot clean pipes. Sitting in the drawing-room was like being at school. Plain sewing was as vulgar as clay pipes, and Mrs. Gummer had to take to fancy-work; and though she tried her best, she could never get on with it. In order to conceal her failure, the girls bought her some Berlin wool-work nearly finished; and, therefore, when Max looked over the frame, he admired Mrs. Gummer's taste and skill. To see Matilda sitting behind that frame, so stout that she could hardly reach over it, trying to count the stitches, striving to distinguish the shades, and knowing that what she did at night would have to be taken out in the morning, vexed me. When Max left, I was sure to be reproved for bad behaviour. I usually took up a book—not that I wanted to read, but Janet and Max were not agreeable society. Sometimes they sat on a sofa, talking in a low tone, Max holding Janet's hand as if he were a policeman and she his prisoner.

At other times they would play chess. When Janet made a move, Max put his hand on hers to help her, as if the chessmen were too heavy to be moved without assistance. Did I want to look at the love-making? But Matilda and the girls said it was rude to be always reading. Next night I did not read.

‘Gummer,’ said Matilda, ‘the way you have been staring at those poor young things, as if you were a detective watching burglars, sent all the blood of my body into my face. Taking them unawares, instead of coughing before you look round. How would you like to have been took unawares when you were a-courting? But trust you for making the poor dear girl’s cup of pleasure tart as stale beer after a thunder-storm.’

When Max was not at Corcyra Villa, we were kept to company manners, because we were never certain that he would not look in, or that the Colonel, or Mrs. De Crespín, or Max’s sisters would not call. Then, the De Crespín servant was two or three times a day at the villa with notes for Janet.



I shall never forget putting on a shirt which had no button on one of the wristbands. Such a trouble had not befallen me since my marriage. I did not lose my temper; but when I came into the breakfast-room I said:

‘Mamma, will you sew a button on my wristband?’

Our footboy happened to be in the room. When his

back was turned, Janet pouted ; Nancy exclaimed : ‘ Oh, pa, how can you ? ’ and Mrs. Gummer was gasping with indignation.

‘ What is all this about ? ’ I asked.

‘ About ! Oh, Gummer, if you want to kill that poor dear girl, why don’t you do it like a man, and put her out of her misery at once ? A pretty thing to be gossiped to the Crespin servants. Sew a button on, indeed ! Never mind, Janet. Your pa always has sat bang down upon the prospects of his offspring ever since the hour of his birth, and he will do so until you are dead, buried, and forgotten.’

‘ You can’t wonder at ma being angry,’ said Nancy.

‘ It seems as if you had only one shirt to put on.’

‘ And as if ma was an eighteenpenny-a-day plain sewer,’ added Janet.

When I was in my prime, my whiskers were big and bushy ; but when they began to whiten I reduced them by shaving, until it became a choice between thin, half-gray tufts on the cheek-bones, or not even the pretence of whiskers. Mrs. Gummer, who had an eye for everything about her, noticed my predicament.

‘ Gummer,’ she said, ‘ it is aggravating that one can’t grow old unbeknown to one’s self and to others ; but I maintain that teeth are far more aggravating than grey hair. Teeth are as handsome as noses, and also much more useful. But our noses are born with us, and never bother us, whilst teeth are a world of pain and convulsions in the cutting ; and when we have got through that, there comes the worry of the second set ;

and before one has a thought of being a little on in life, there is decay, racking toothache, and a fortune to spend over false teeth. Why everybody should be put to this suffering, and money out of pocket, instead of our teeth, like our noses, being born with us ready for use and lasting till they are not wanted, just for the sake of keeping a whole tribe of dentists, is a riddle that I defy any mortal tongue to guess. Tom, life is chock-full of riddles, which are like posts, for unless you run your head against them they don't hurt you. And, Tom, when you are pushed against a post make the best of the bump. And I don't see why a clean shave should give men face-ache, for women who are born clean shaved are not troubled with the complaint.'

I soon had a double dose of courting. The Baron returned, and proposed. He was accepted ; but, as I told Matilda, it was not a love-match on the part of Nancy, though I liked the Baron better than Max De Crespin.

'So do I, Tom, and so will Nancy. It isn't always first-sight love that is the most lasting. Most people take to sweet wine and tarts at the first taste, but it isn't always a taste that lasts for life. Now beer, and I suppose likewise tobacco, are trials at the beginning, but when the taste for them comes it lasts for life. A man may shed his sweet tooth, but he sticks to his beer that he did not take to at first. If a girl cannot be happy with a baron, who is handsome and amiable, and thousands a year, she can be happy with no one. And, Gummer, I've told the Baron Nancy shall not

be transported. They are to live in England, and proud we shall be of their lordship and ladyship.'

There are some disagreeables of which one can see the benefit—such as courting. When Janet and Max were first engaged, I could not bear the thought of the wedding, and the loss of my dear girl. When Nancy and the Baron were engaged I felt doubly miserable at the prospect of the double wedding-day. Before the girls had been bespoke for a month I gladly agreed that they should be married as soon as I could complete the settlements. I should have been still more plagued with the billy-cooing if I had not been thrust into public life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

M.P. FOR MARROWBONE.

As Mrs. Gummer says, effects are often no more like their causes than an egg is like a hen.

The Emperor of China was the cause of my entering the political arena, as the *Green Lanes Herald* eloquently calls going into public life. His Sublime Majesty would not dismiss Ching-Ching-Chu, who would not execute Chu-Chu-Ching, who, at the head of a gang of pig-tail pirates, seized a British ship, and murdered the crew. There was a three-days' Chinese debate in the House of Commons. At three p.m. on a Saturday morning there was a division, and the Ministers were beaten. There was a crisis, and an appeal to the country. Lord Pluckton, the Prime Minister, issued an address, in which he declared that the Empire was prosperous and secure and that the Government fearlessly appealed to the country. Mr. Doesrally, the leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons, issued an address in which he declared that the glorious empire, purchased with the genius, valour, and blood of an ancient people, was brought to the

verge of the abyss of ruin by the plundering and blundering of a muddling Ministry. Mrs. Gummer, who now read the papers, observed to the Colonel that if what Mr. Doesrally said was true, Lord Pluckton and his lot ought to be sent to the Tower, and if it was not true, Mr. Doesrally and his lot were libellers, who ought to be transported.

‘My dear madam,’ said the Colonel, ‘it is the same sauce differently labelled. Your husband is a Liberal and I am a Tory, as the De Crespins always have been, and, I suppose, always will be. Not that it makes, so far as the country is concerned, the dust of a fig-leaf which side a man takes. In this happy country, politics is a sham fight for the amusement of the million. The Liberals give as little as they can to keep office, and the Tories promise no more than they are obliged to get office.’

Two days after the General Election was announced, I was playfully abused by Matilda and the girls.

‘It’s too bad, pa, to make us look like fools,’ said Janet. .

‘Well, pa, you are sly,’ said Nancy.

‘It’s just like your pa,’ said Mrs. Gummer. ‘He never opened his mouth in the bosom of his family, though he keeps no secrets from strangers.’

‘What will Max think when he hears of it? He will suppose I knew it and did not tell him.’

‘I am sure,’ said Nancy, ‘that Mrs. Bungay thought we were fibbing when we told her we knew nothing about it.’

‘What is the matter?’

‘Matter, Gummer! Well, it is trying to hear the butcher who has stuck the animal asking who killed the pig. And who supposes that there is any harm in people with our means being in Parliament? But there is harm in a father blindfolding the eyes of his family to what all the world sees.’

‘I really don’t understand you.’

‘Now, pa,’ said Janet, ‘it’s no use pretending. Mrs. Bungay told us all about it, and gave us the paper to read.’

Nancy handed me the *Elector’s Spur*, and pointed to the following :

‘We understand that Mr. Thomas Gummer, who lately inherited the most colossal fortune ever made in India, will be requisitioned to stand for Marrowbone. Mr. Gummer is an advanced Liberal and an eloquent speaker. His presence in Parliament will be a gain to the Party. He has intimated his willingness to contest the borough, and his return is certain.’

This was the first I had heard about standing for Marrowbone, and the announcement perplexed me.

‘Look at pa! Can’t he act!’ said Janet.

‘Never mind, pa, we will forgive you since you have been so nicely found out,’ said Nancy.

‘Gummer, you may look as innocent as a lamp-post on a moonlight night, but it don’t take in Matilda Gummer. The *Elector’s Spur* may be uncommon clever, but cleverer than Solomon it can’t be; and even Solomon could not have guessed that you had said you would go into Parliament, if you had not said it.’

Mrs. Gummer and the girls were persuaded that I had deceived them. The *Elector's Spur* kept me awake for half the night, trying to unravel the mystery.

It was explained the next day, when a gentleman, very stout, very red in the face, bald crown and side hair thin and shiny, who wore a thick gold Albert chain, and very thick town-made black kid gloves, and whose name is Busted, called upon me. Mr. Busted is not a Green Lanes man, but comes from another quarter of the metropolis. Mr. Busted is a purveyor, which is the genteel word for butcher. Mr. Busted is a vestryman, and also chairman of the Marrowbone Voters' Protection Association.

I knew no more of Mr. Busted than I do of the serpent's cousin-german; yet he was as much at home with me as if he had been a twin-brother, and he the superior twin. He pulled off his glove, and shook me by the hand for at least two minutes.

'Glad to see you, Mr. Gummer; and, sir, I am sure that you, as a public man, with a stake in the country, will reciprocate the patriotic feelings which warm the heart of Nathaniel Busted!'

Mr. Busted flopped down on a fancy chair, which creaked beneath his weight; deposited his hat on the ground, pulled off his other glove, took out a silk pocket-handkerchief, wiped his forehead, dried the palms of his hands, and then asked after the health of 'my good lady' and the young ladies.

If I am not a lamb in temper, I certainly cannot be called peppery; but that Busted enraged me, and it

was all the worse because I could not have my passion out. If Busted had intended to be rude, I should have laughed at him ; but he meant to be civil, and that provoked me. I answered him rather tartly.



‘ I have not the honour of your acquaintance, Mr. Nathaniel Busted. May I ask what business has procured me the pleasure of this visit ?’

There was no mistaking the way in which I uttered the words ‘ honour’ and ‘ pleasure.’ It ought to have withered the purveyor, but it did not.

Mr. Busted rose from the fancy chair, stared violently at the wall, put his left hand between his shirt and waistcoat, and with his right hand struck the table.

‘ The humble individual before you, sir, may not be known to you, sir, and there ain’t a handle or a tail to his name, sir ; but, sir, he is known in the vast area of politics ; and permit me to inform you, sir, that Cabinet Councils have shook in their shoes at the name of Busted. By trade, sir, I am a purveyor, and I am not ashamed to say that my pockets are lined by the honest sweat of my brow, and by profession I am a Reformer. Nathaniel Busted, sir, is a vestryman, and the chairman, sir, of the Marrowbone Voters’ Protection Association : an institution, sir, that is the bulwark of the

glory of the empire on which the noonday sun has never sat, and will never do so whilst Britons is Britons.'

Mr. Busted again flopped down on the fancy chair, brought out the silk handkerchief, mopped his face and head, dried his hands, and glared at me defiantly.

I muttered that I was much obliged to Mr. Busted for visiting me.

'Sir, there is no obligation. I am here, sir, in the course and faithful discharge of my public duty as chairman of the Marrowbone Voters' Protection Association. And now to come to business, as my honourable friend the Home Secretary has more than once observed. Sir, it has been moved, seconded, and unanimously carried that you should be asked to stand for our borough, the important, and leading, and Liberal Metropolitan borough of Marrowbone.'

I bowed, became very hot, and told Mr. Busted that I could only thank him for the honour.

Being asked to go into Parliament takes the coolness out of a fellow.

'And, Mr. Gummer, you can rely upon my word, which is and always will be my bond, that your return is as safe as quarter-day, at next to no cost. What have our present members done for their day and generation? Nothing, sir. What have they done for the country? Nothing, sir. What have they done for the borough? Nothing, sir. What gratitude do they show to their supporters? None, sir. Call at their houses, and they are not at home. Call at their

clubs, and they are in a dreadful hurry to get down to the House. Call at the House, and they are in the very midst of a debate. Our politics are Liberal, I may say ultra-hot Liberal and gingered with a little radicalism on the froth, Mr. Gummer: and what we want is a member who has the means, and is able and willing to deal fair and square with the borough and his supporters. Go in for the publican interest and the working-class interest. I will return you for less than £1000. The pledging is rather stiff, but that is of no consequence. If a member sticks to the borough and his supporters, he is never particularly bored about pledges, which may be unredeemed provided the interest is paid up sharp.'

I liked the idea of being a member of Parliament, and told Mr. Busted I would stand. But I did not like Mr. Busted's style. What he said was passable, but his manner was bumptious. If Mr. Busted had been a belted earl, tracing back to Adam or even to the jelly fish, which Dr. Festus Codam, says was the beginning of mankind ever so many millions of years ago, instead of being a purveying butcher, his swagger could not have been more immense. He treated me as if I were body and soul his property, as if I were a calf he had bought in the Cattle Market. If every M.P. was obliged to have his Busted, things would soon be upside down; and instead of bribing voters, it would come to voters bribing gentlemen to become candidates.

I suggested a glass of wine.

‘Certainly, Mr. Gummer, for sherry is to business what oil is to wheels. It is the suet that bastes the meat. And what would be the worth of public life without hospitality?’

Mr. Busted rolled my sherry about in his huge cheeks before gulping it down, and was good enough to say that the wine was light and clean ; though, for his own drinking, he preferred a sherry with a little more body, and he would put me on to some first-rate stuff.

‘Sherry, Mr. Gummer, that a bishop would smack his lips over ; and yet the figure for it is by no means alarming for an uncommon article.’

Mr. Busted praised Corcyra Villa, which he described as cosy and compact ; but regretted I did not live in his borough.

‘Though I’m not sure, Mr. Gummer, as I am that beef is beef, and that veal is likewise beef cut off in its tender youth, whether it is best or worst to be a resident member. It gets votes the first election, because every tradesman reckons on the custom ; and canvassers who know their way about make the most of the idea, which is not bribery, though it is equal to it in its consequences. The shopkeeper, sir, is the backbone of the country, which keeps the head and the legs together, and gives to the one its vitals and to the others their motion ; the shop shutters are the armour, the shop counter the bulwark, and shop-till the resources of our mighty Empire. You must court and cherish the shopkeeper. But if a member has a

purse ever so deep, he can't have a thousand tradesmen; and, therefore, there is a feeling of being done, and a loss of votes at the next election. On the whole, living just out of bounds is best, provided it is flowered over with liberal subscriptions to local institutions, plenty of chair-taking, and upright and downright old English hospitality and friendship to leading supporters. A glass of wine, Mr. Gummer' (here he bolted a bumper of the light and clean sherry) 'give and took, in a 'ail good fellow spirit, is glue that sticks supporter to member. And, Mr. Gummer, there is no time to be chucked away. To-morrow a deputation from our Association will be here, at three precise, and we will get out bills in the evening.'

How to receive a deputation I knew not. I remembered reading of a great statesman receiving a deputation on his staircase; but the stairs of Coreyra Villa are narrow and winding. I thought of the dining-room; but Mrs. Gummer insisted that the drawing-room was the proper place, for if the deputation were genteel quality they would have a right to the best room, and if they were not quality they would feel it more. Was I to sit or stand? Reference was made to a book of etiquette bought by Janet, but there was not a word about deputations. Mrs. Gummer thought it would be more consequential to sit. Janet had read a novel by Lady de Fludze, called 'Julia Dashwood; or, the Duchess of Golconda,' containing a grand account of being presented at Court, which tells how the Sovereign has to stand for hours, and

eats a bushel of native oysters and drinks an imperial gallon of double stout to put in the requisite strength. Janet argued that what a monarch did I might do without loss of dignity.

Mrs. Gummer thought that the deputation should be shown into the drawing-room first, and that I should keep them waiting a few minutes, just to let them think that visitors did not flurry me, and that I was otherwise engaged. The girls thought it would be more taking if I were in the drawing-room, reclining on the couch, reading a book, and to start up suddenly, as though surprised by the visit. If I kept them waiting they might think I was taking an early dinner, or doing some other horribly vulgar thing. Then, were the deputation to sit or stand? Finally, we agreed they were to do as they liked, and that I was to follow their example.

I devoted the evening and next morning to the study and delivery of a speech. I remembered that a celebrated Greek practised at the seaside with his mouth full of stones. I filled my mouth with pebbles, and recited 'The Grampian Hills' whilst Janet was playing the 'Battle of Prague.' I have never repeated the experiment, for it made my teeth ache, and I nearly choked myself with one of the pebbles. Mrs. Gummer proposed to put the stones into a small muslin bag, but I defy a Greek gentleman or any other individual to talk if he has a bag of assorted flints in his mouth.

I got up a neat and rather elegant speech, but I did not deliver it, for when the time came for speaking I

could only remember, 'Gentlemen, it is with a sentiment of profound emotion.'

At the appointed hour, Mr. Busted and his friends—a dozen of them—arrived in a private omnibus. Mrs. Gummer was vexed at the unlucky number of thirteen, but she remembered as soon as they came in the room I should make the fourteenth. All the patriots had on conspicuously clean shirts with prodigious collars, new shiny hats, and black kid gloves on the left hand only—the right being bare, for the purpose of shaking. When the deputies were shown in, they coughed in chorus, piled their hats upon the piano, and wiped their foreheads with silk handkerchiefs of gorgeous patterns. I repeat that if Busted had been my Siamese twin brother, only cut loose a week before, he could not have been more affectionate. He squeezed my hand, so that the bantam cock of my signet-ring was engraved on the flesh of my second finger. Also he nearly dislocated my shoulder by his Siamese shaking. The deputation followed the example of their leader, and I noticed that all their hands were warm and moist.

'Gentlemen,' said Busted, 'fellow-electors, I am proud on this auspicious occasion to introduce you to my esteemed and intimate friend, Mr. Thomas Gummer.'

I bowed to the deputies, and the deputies cried 'Hear, hear.'

'Gentlemen,' said Busted, 'we will sink the offal of ceremony, and proceed to business. When you have a point, fix on it straightforward and at once.'

Cries of 'Hear, hear,' and stamping on the floor.

Busted, whose height was not in proportion to his circumference, mounted upon a footstool, blew his nose, wiped his forehead, coughed as if he had a herring-bone in his throat, put his arms akimbo as well as his stoutness would allow, and stared fiercely at the chandelier.

Cries of 'Hear, hear,' and more stamping on our brand-new best Brussels.

'Mr. Gummer, sir,—We, the chairman and committee of the Voters' Protection Association, have the honour to wait on you as a deputation for the purpose of laying before you resolutions proposed at our last meeting, and the which our worthy secretary, Mr. Boocurr, will read.' (Applause.)

Mr. Boocurr, a bilious-looking chemist and druggist, in a white choker, read the resolutions with impressive solemnity. Mrs. Gummer and the girls, who were listening outside, declared that no parson could have been more imposing.

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'Resolved, that in the opinion of the Voters' Protection Association, Mr. Thomas Gummer, from his long-tried and consistent Liberalism, from his devotion to the interests of the great middle-class, the backbone of the country ; from his just defence of the rights of the working-classes, from his high character and his noble benevolence, is a fit and proper person to represent our important borough in the Commons House of Parliament.

‘Resolved, that our honourable chairman and our committee be requested to wait on Mr. Thomas Gummer, and to ask him to allow himself to be put in nomination.

‘Resolved, that if Mr. Thomas Gummer consents to contest the borough, we pledge ourselves to secure his return by every means in our power.

‘Signed on behalf of the meeting by Nathaniel Busted, Chairman, and countersigned by Horatio Washington Boocurr, secretary.’

Busted remounted the footstool, and made a long speech. He praised the public spirit and patriotism of the association. He declared that he gloried in the name of Briton, for though a Briton could be loyal to a constitutional throne, his gore was ready to be shed like water in defence of the liberty of a free people. He described me as his old and trusted friend, and as a man who would do honour to Parliament and the borough. He wound up by saying that Mr. Boocurr had drawn up a list of questions, and he pledged his public reputation to that deputation, to the association, and to the country that I would, answer them satisfactorily.

Mr. Horatio Washington Boocurr then read the questions :

‘Are you prepared to defend and advance to their culminating glory those eternal principles of British liberty which are the envy and admiration of the world ?

‘ Will you support a measure for limiting the shooting season to two months—a measure which would benefit the farmer, and also the mighty heart of the British empire, by lengthening the London season ?

‘ Will you vote for the exemption of shopkeepers from the odious and inquisitorial income-tax ?

‘ Will you vote for less taxes and more efficiency ?

‘ Will you vote for the local parliaments called vestries having the full and irresponsible control of the local taxes ?

‘ Will you support a measure for compelling the newspapers to report the debates of the local parliaments as fully as they do the debates of the Parliament at Westminster ?

The deputation had engaged a reporter ; and according to the report in the *Electors’ Spur*, copied into the *Green Lanes Herald*, I find that I gave an unqualified assent to all these propositions, that I addressed the deputation with spirit and eloquence, that I consented to stand, and that my speech was loudly cheered. Well, it is a wise man who knows his own speeches in print. My idea was that I broke down after the first half sentence. But, of course, the papers must be right.

The speeches being over, we attacked the sherry. Again Mr. Busted rolled the wine from cheek to cheek, and pronounced it light and clean.

‘ None of your South African pigswill, gentlemen,’ he remarked to the deputation. ‘ None of your headache

poison at two bob a bottle. Our honourable friend, gentlemen, has a palate that can't be took in, and a purse equal to his taste. A light and clean sherry, Mr. Gummer, is not come across everywhere's.'

Yes, Busted treated me as if I belonged to him, body, soul, and estate. He told the deputation that Corcyra Villa was a long leasehold, and that Mr. Gummer knew better what to do with his 'ready' than to sink it in bricks and mortar. Although he had not seen Mrs. Gummer or the girls, he spoke of them in a fatty, fatherly, patronising sort of way. He called me on one side, and whispered that a subscription of £100 to the funds of the association would be a good investment; and, before I could answer, he favoured me with an expressive wink, mounted the stool and said:

'I am very happy to inform you, gentlemen, that my honourable friend, and our future member, has given a first subscription of £100 to the funds of our association.' (Immense applause.)

Busted then proposed a glass of sherry all round to my health, ditto to my family, ditto to the association, and ditto to the borough.

The repeated glasses did not in the least affect Busted or his friends—and I am told that leading local politicians are good at sherry—but they were telling on me. I was reflecting on the possible consequences of the deputies seeing their future member somewhat shaky on his legs, and indistinct in speech, when Busted said:

‘Gentlemen, we must not keep the conveyance any longer. Drivers is human, and horseflesh is money.’

After shaking hands—my signet-ring again lacerating the flesh of my finger—the deputation got out of the house, into the omnibus, and went off—not, however, before Busted had pointed out to the deputies the garden and the elevation of Corcyra Villa.

I am not a revengeful man—at least, I think not—but to kick that bumptious Busted, or to see him kicked, would be a real and most heartfelt pleasure.

‘Gummer,’ said my wife, ‘we don’t make our own ladders ; and we must put up with what come to us, or remain on the ground. And when one is up, it is easy to kick down the ladder ; but it’s foolish to do so whilst one is mounting. And what, Gummer, can you expect from a Busted that is a butcher, and lives by meat, and is ashamed of the trade that feeds and clothes and houses him, and calls himself by a grand name ? A man who thinks himself above himself is beneath your notice.’

If anyone is fat and wants to get thin, and can afford to pay two or three thousand pounds for the reduction of his weight, let him contest the borough of Marrowbone. For a fortnight I was worried and excited from seven in the morning until midnight. All the chairmen and committee-men of the various committees bothered me in turn. Every one was sure that the election would not be won unless something he advised was done, and that something was sure to involve an outlay of money. The £1500 was gone in about a

week, and I found that the election cost me £2991 17s. 3d. I had to make three or four speeches a day, and to answer all sorts of questions. But the patriotic butcher was the worst worry of all. Busted arrived at Corcyra Villa to breakfast. He drove to town with me. He lunched with me. He dined with me. He went to meetings with me. Busted stuck to me closer than the most devoted brother, and it was so hard to be civil to Busted that now and then I had to bite my tongue to stop a word that would have enraged him, and perhaps have lost me the election.

I was at the head of the poll, and Thomas Gummer, son of the Golden Boot, became M.P.

‘Tom,’ said Mrs. Gummer, ‘the only good luck my poor dear pa had was winning in a raffle a ticket to go up in a balloon, which, not having the nerve, he would not have done for the world. Poor pa gave the ticket to a person who was dunning him for a little account, and, as poor pa told him, he was quite safe, for his creditors never died. I remember the party coming to us the next day and saying he never felt giddy but once, no matter how high he went, and that once was when he tried to look down at the place from which he started. Tom, I should feel like a whirligig if ever I thought of having rose from Matilda Brace, a waistcoat hand. Don’t look down, Tom, to what you were, or you will be upset. Look up, and you will not be giddy. You are an M.P. now, Tom, and you ought to look upwards to being a Prime Minister and a Peer, wearing garters outside your

trousers, as I have read in the papers. But why it should be aristocratic to garter outside the trousers as a navvy does, though of course his garter is a string when it isn't a strap, I don't know. But, as I was saying, Tom, unless you want to be a reeler, don't look down at what you were, but always look up to what you may be and will be if you are an aspirer.'

'Really, Matilda, I don't want to rise any higher. I should not be happier if I were a duke.'

'Perhaps not, Tom, for some people have stomachs that no food agrees with, and others have dispositions that nothing makes happy. Not having been a duke, and also not being you, I can't say whether being a duke would make you happier. But anyhow, Tom, it isn't what we have that makes us happy, whether it's much or little, and a man who isn't hoping for something he has not got is in a bad moping way. It's all your liver, Tom, and if you took a big blue pill you wouldn't shy at being an Emperor. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Gummer, M.P.! To be sure, Tom, it does sound well, and I shouldn't feel prouder if we were your Imperial Majesties.'

How James—who now wore a grand livery—stared the next day when his mistress ordered him to tell the hon. member for Marrowbone that lunch was ready!

CHAPTER XIX.

NANCY AND THE EMPEROR OF RUSSIA.



THE Colonel and the Baron, who had become excellent friends, did not agree about my going into Parliament. The Colonel said that the House of Commons

was an expensive club, and that if I had resolved to become M.P. I should have gone in for a quiet borough. 'A metropolitan borough, my dear Gummer, is work and worry in session and out of session, and no reward.'

The Baron smiled and shook his head.

'My dear Colonel, I admire your political talk. It is better than Plutarch's Lives. Six hundred and fifty-eight gentlemen paying an enormous sum of money for the honour of working at the political pumps! I do not believe in giving something for nothing. Think also of the millions that go through the national sieve. Also of the patronage, concessions,

and all sorts of private bills. No. It pays to be in the House of Commons, or men would not pay to get into the House of Commons. Colonel, you remember that at one time the members were paid. Ah, that was before the House of Commons was purse-keeper !

‘Baron, you are a foreigner, and therefore your remarks are not offensive. As Mrs. Gummer says, we charge our neighbours with our faults and credit ourselves with our neighbours’ virtues. Still, my dear Baron, it is strange that your notions of public trust are so painfully un-English.’

‘Public trust ! Or public honour, if you will ! What, my dear Colonel, was there no public trust and public honour when Walpole paid his supporters ? Or is this public trust and public honour a modern invention—a new patent political pill ? Has the Sovereign no public honour ? and yet the Sovereign is paid. Have the Judges no public trust and no public honour ? But they are paid. It is the same with Bishops, with Ministers of the Crown, with Ambassadors, with the gallant soldiers and sailors. All are paid for serving their country, all but the members of the House of Commons, and, marvel of marvels, they are not only unpaid for service, but pay for the privilege of serving. They are waiters, who must pay for their places and yet take no fees.’

‘Ambition and the love of social distinction make men pay for seats in the House. A diamond necklace does not pay, but women covet it.’

‘Well, Colonel, our dear friend who is member for

Marrowbone will see. Maybe he will not tell us. Perhaps, as he does not want it, he will not seek it, and his share of the patriot's sugar-plums will be taken by the others. The Nizam of Bungbaboo sent away an excellent doctor because he was said to be so honest that he would not take a present from persons who wished him to recommend them to the Nizam. I remonstrated, but the Nizam replied, "Incognitoff, the man who will not take his share of the plunder is a fool or a disguised and therefore a dangerous rogue, and so I never trust those who do not take care of themselves."

The Colonel was right, and the Baron altogether wrong. I had no patriot's sugar-plums and yet no rest from my constituents. Our big bag was filled with their letters. They called on me at Corcyra Villa. They button-holed me at the House. Some wanted me to support or oppose Bills ; some to ask questions, often for the purpose of advertising the names of cunning and ambitious constituents ; some to use my influence with the Government to get appointments ; some to preside at local meetings ; some to join the boards of public companies : some begged for subscriptions to charities, and others for loans. Busted was a ceaseless bore, and it was a great relief when he was laid up with a severe illness. It was a long time before I could screw up my courage to attempt a speech, and then I completely broke down. Until you get used to it, listening is dull work ; for there is very little oratory, and business talk may be useful, but it is not

amusing. When I was riding from Westminster to the Green Lanes late at night, or early in the morning, I thought of the Colonel's words. Being a member of Parliament is paying for continual worry and wearisome work, yet I did not think of giving it up, but I was so anxious to keep my seat that I was the devoted slave of troublesome constituents, and tenderly attentive to the sick butcher, Busted.

'Ah, Gummer!' said Matilda, 'as poor dear pa observed about a Prime Minister who worked eighteen hours a day till he was all skin-shrivelled from head to toe, "statesmen as well as burglars must suffer for being public characters and getting into the papers."' '

Personal and domestic affairs distracted my attention. I was getting short of money. Mr. Sparks would not make any further advance until he had a letter from his son, who had gone to India to realise the estate. Mrs. Gummer and the girls resolved unanimously that Corcyra Villa and the Green Lanes were not good enough for the family of a rich M.P., and, on the advice of the Baron, I entered into an agreement for a house at South Kensington, at the moderate rental of £300 a-year, and gave orders for it to be decorated and furnished at a cost not exceeding £2500. And the South Kensington mansion was the cause of rather a warm dispute between Matilda and the Baron.

About the time we determined to leave the Green Lanes, the Baron expressed a desire to marry Nancy immediately. Nancy said she did not want to be

married yet, and that she would not be married before Janet. I suggested that I could not make a settlement until I received some part of my uncle's property ; but the Baron replied that was not of the least consequence, as he and Nancy did not doubt that I should produce the money under the trust at the proper time. As for the £5000 that was to be given by me towards the expenses of setting up an establishment, his solicitor was willing to discount my note of hand. Mrs. Gummer objected to her daughter being married from Corcyra Villa, and wished the ceremony put off until we were in our South Kensington mansion. Mrs. Gummer was supported by Nancy, and for a week the Baron was not able to carry his point.

Then he called and frankly told us the reason for his desire to be forthwith married.

'My dear madam,' he said to Mrs. Gummer, 'I am the most miserable man in the world. I love your dear daughter, and if she does not become my wife I shall die from a broken heart. And yet if I do not marry her in a fortnight she can never be my wife.'

'A fortnight !' exclaimed Mrs. Gummer. 'My dear Baron, it is nonsense. My cook would require more notice. A fortnight indeed !'

'But, my dear madam, and my dear Mr. Gummer, you will permit me in the most solemn confidence to tell why it is so urgent. I am Baron Incognitoff, that is a Baron of Russia. My august master, the Emperor, has heard of my engagement to your dear daughter, and he declares that he will not allow the marriage.

And, moreover, he has commanded me to be with him in three weeks, and then he will command me to marry an Imperial ward, the only daughter of the late Duke Shamblesoff.'

'The brute!' said Mrs. Gummer. 'How dare he object to my Nancy, as if the daughter of a member of Parliament was not good enough for a Russian! If you took my advice, Baron, you would never set foot in the brute's country again, and let him do his worst, which is nothing. A fish that has escaped out of the net may laugh at the fiercest fishmonger that ever skinned soles alive.'

'Mrs. Gummer gives you good advice, Baron,' said I.

'Ah, my dear friends, it is good counsel, but it is impossible. If I disobey, my estates are forfeited. And if an Incognitoff could see the patrimony won by the blood of his glorious ancestry become the property of the stranger, still it is impossible. My dear madam, my life would not be safe if I defied my august master. As the Ambassador told me this morning, the Czar has a long arm: he can strike me in England. He can strike me anywhere. He could harpoon me in the Polar Sea.'

'Perhaps the party you call your august master don't know that we have police in this country, who would take him into custody as soon as look at him if he tried on any of his wicked games here. A bear may kill and eat men in his native country, but if he sets foot in England he is Zoological Gardened before he can so much as growl.'

‘And, my dear Baron,’ said I, ‘if you were to marry our Nancy in a fortnight, you would still be disobeying the Emperor.’

‘And I must say, Baron,’ said Mrs. Gummer, ‘that fond as we are of you, our Nancy is not a lot for which there is only one bidder. If she were free to-morrow, there are lords and dukes who would be proud to have her knocked down to them.’

‘An Emperor would be proud of her, for your dear daughter would adorn a throne. But, Mrs. Gummer, it is this way, that I could marry in a fortnight and not later. I am privately informed of the Emperor’s designs by my good friend the Ambassador. Indeed, it is the instructions of his Imperial Majesty that I am not to be told of the intended marriage with the daughter of the late Duke Shamblesoff. If I marry in a fortnight there is no disobedience, and my beloved bride will be graciously received at the Court of my Sovereign. That is the advice of my good friend the Ambassador. My fate, my happiness, my all, is in your hands. If you decree me misery, I shall bear it like an Incognitoff, and I shall pray for the happiness of the queen of my heart ; but that heart will be crushed, and sorrow will kill the last of the Incognitoffs.’

The Baron said a great deal more, Mrs. Gummer became hysterical with an attack of the spasms, and, finally, we agreed to a quiet wedding in a fortnight, on condition that there was a grand ball on the return from the honeymoon. Nancy cried all the evening, and I told Matilda that we ought not to force her to marry the Baron.

‘As to forcing, Gummer, I want to know where Nancy would have been when she bolted a whole ounce of almond rock at two years old and was getting blue-black in the face if I had not forced the castor oil down her throat? And if you, being a father, hold with forcing a child to swallow the most awful physic ever invented by doctors for her good, I don’t see how you can, unless your reason has emigrated to foreign parts, fly out at forcing a child to swallow something for her happiness for life. And there is no forcing, for her “rather not” is only a sham—a whim that I won’t give way to. She would have cried a deal more if the Baron had been hooked by the Emperor to Minx Shamblesoff. All girls cry when the day is fixed. I cried when you fixed the day. Perhaps I should have cried all the moisture out of my body and brought myself down to dry bones if I had known that I was to be tied for all the days of my life to a temper that never strikes like a man, but tortures like a flea on the part of the back you can’t get at to scratch. Forcing, indeed, when the party is a Baron with an estate, and as fine a man as ever said “Will you” to a queen. A cow might bellow till she cracked her horns, but don’t tell me she would want any real forcing to make her lie down for life in clover.’

‘It is curious, Matilda, how Emperors interfere with us. It is through the Emperor of China that I am M.P. for Marrowbone, and it is through the Emperor of Russia that Nancy is to be Baroness Incognitoff in a fortnight.’

‘And the Emperors shall find that we are equal to standing on the pinnacle the fortune has put us on. Though for that matter, Tom, there is no particular merit in being on the floor to which fortune raises you. It is as easy to sit on a couch in a drawing-room, as it is to sit on a wooden chair in the kitchen, and far more comfortable. But a fish that is gold scaled, Tom, should not behave like a common sprat that is to be dried or maybe oiled into a sardine.’

What a busy fortnight we had. There was the settlement, prepared by the Baron’s lawyer, and that took up three mornings. There was the fixing on a mansion for the Baron, and he entered into negotiations for one of the grandest places at the West End. There were the preparations at home. The quantity of clothing sent in for Nancy was prodigious, more, as Matilda said, than she could wear out if she lived to be a female Old Parr. The wedding was to be strictly private. We invited the De Crespins, three Irish M.P.’s—the Irish members are the best in the House, being jolly and quite easy—also an Irish peer, who had nothing to live on but his title and the folly of his fellow-creatures, who had goods to sell on trust, or money to lose, by lending without security, that is, upon his lordship’s promise to pay. Dr. and Mrs. Bungay were invited after long hesitation. Mrs. Gummer thought that it was not proper to invite people who earned their living to meet people who were born to their living.

‘It’s not from my own pride, Tom, for I like the

Doctor, and also his good, dear wife, who must have a great deal to put up with, her husband being rung out of his first sleep, and coming to bed again all hours of the night. And I don't say there is any sense in a bee that fattens on the honey that its father stored by hook and crook looking down on a bee that never tastes honey it doesn't gather ; but, for the sake of the girls, we mustn't take a step out of the bounds of Society, and bring ever so many hornet-nests on ourselves.'

Next day Janet when reading the fashionable intelligence in the newspaper, saw that some doctors had been at a State Concert at Buckingham Palace, and Dr. Bungay and his wife were forthwith invited to the wedding, Matilda remarking that if the Queen invited her doctors we might, without forgetting what was our position, invite our doctor.

Who was to perform the ceremony ? Mrs. Gummer was indignant at the suggestion of the rector, assisted by the curate, and compelled me to write to the Archbishop of Canterbury ; but a chaplain replied that his Grace was too pressed with engagements to comply with my request. An application to the Bishop of London was equally unsuccessful.

'It's enough, Tom, to make us unmissionaried heathens or at least to drive us into a chapel. But the Dissenters have no bishops, and we should be no better off. The engagements are nonsense. It's just because we live in the Green Lanes. There are parsons enough for the business of the common people,

and bishops ought to be for the upper classes, who can afford to pay them. Perhaps Mr. London, and also Mr. Canterbury, with all their thousands, would not have been so fast with their "cannots" if they had known what you were going to put into the hand of the knot-tier if he was a bishop, leave alone an Arch, when we procession-ed into the vestry for poor dear Nancy to sign Gummer for the last time.'

Fortunately, the De Crespins have a cousin a Colonial Bishop, who is generally at home for the benefit of his health, and he agreed to perform the ceremony, assisted by the rector and the curate.

The Baron was very vexed that he could not get the jewels from the bankers before the marriage, but he ordered a necklace, earrings, brooch, cross, rings, and tiara from his St. Petersburg jeweller.

'I have instructed him that they are to be brilliants of the purest water. You see, my dear madam'—the Baron was speaking to Mrs. Gummer—'we get the finest stones in St. Petersburg, and the firm has been the Incognitoff jewellers for years. Yes, my dear madam, though I have given them till the last day I am sure the jewels will arrive in time. A Russian jeweller has heard of banishment to Siberia, and he dares not dissappoint an Incognitoff. When I was in India, the firm trained some pigeons to fly between Bungaboo and St. Petersburg, and I and my friend the Nizam, and his wife, used to send our loose stones by the birds to St. Petersburg to be set, and when set they were returned to us by the birds.'

I wonder if there is a charm—that is, a magical and, perhaps, an evil charm—in jewels. When I was at Purrem and Mangles', we were concerned in a great financial case. A man, who had ruined two or three banks and two or three thousand families, always worked with jewels. He presented jewels to the wives of directors, and of bank managers, and of others whom he wanted to bribe or to befool. I suppose none of the ladies would have taken gifts of money, or even gifts of costly dresses, though they could not say nay to jewels. As I have said before, we had a fair show of divorce business at Purrem and Mangles', and over and over again I noticed that the mischief began with the gift of a jewel. I suppose that if there had been a Mrs. St. Anthony she would have resisted all temptations, except the offer of jewelry. Now Nancy never was a greedy girl, yet I am sure she was vexed and anxious about the promised diamonds. I thought she was fretting about the marriage, but when, about ten o'clock the night before the wedding-day, the Baron brought the jewels and opened the case, I saw her eye brighten, and she looked happier than she had done since the wedding-day had been fixed. Mrs. Gummer was delighted, and I think that Janet's face flushed with envy.

The Baron left us early, but we did not go to bed until long after midnight. We talked little and looked at the jewels much.

'Ah, Tom,' said Mrs. Gummer, 'if those who are gone before see what they love on earth are doing,

won't my poor dear pa feel proud to-morrow when he sees his Matty's own daughter a Baroness, wearing jewels that would do honour to an Empress, and that would break any pawnbroker who tried to take them in and lend according to their value.'

CHAPTER XX.

THE WEDDING AND THE EMPEROR.

‘FOR a mother, unless she is a cat who does not care for her kittens after the ninth day when they open their eyes, to go to bed when her daughter is to be married in the morning, is undressing for lying awake all night, even if she does try calculating what ounces come to at odd farthings a pound, which poor dear pa said is equal to laudanum. No, Tom, there is not a wink of sleep for me; but, of course, you will sleep. You always do sleep, and never speak a word to me, spasms or no spasms.’

The girls also said that they should not sleep, and Nancy proposed that they should sit up. I did not say that I should not sleep, but I thought so.

We were all wrong. Mrs. Gummer slept so soundly that she was obliged to admit she had not been awake quite all the night.

‘It is like culling knave of spades and forebodes no good to me, Tom. It is not often that I have slept so soundly that the breathing of a butterfly would not wake me, and then it has always been the forerunner

of illness. I remember sleeping soon after poor, dear Nancy was born, and not hearing the milk, nor you dressing, and in two days came the gathered finger that cost me four quarten loaves for bread-poultices.'

We had all slept well, and there was no little alarm when Matilda looked at her watch and saw that it was nearly eight o'clock.

'And to be in the church at a quarter to eleven! The poor dear girl can never be dressed in time.'

I was deserted in my own house. No one seemed to think of anything but the bride, and perhaps just a little about the bride's mother. I rang the bell, but there was no answer. All the servants were busy with Nancy and Mrs. Gummer. I had plenty of time to reflect upon Nancy going away and Janet to follow, and I began to think that a wedding was almost as dull as a funeral, at least, to the father of the girl who is to be taken from the home. Presently, I was sent for to see Nancy. I found her weeping, surrounded by her mother, her sister, her maid, the milliner, the milliner's assistant, and a bespangled young man who was a Bond Street artist in hair.

'If you don't bear up, Nancy, you will give me an attack that will lay me on a bed of sickness from which all the physic that ever was bottled will not raise me. And to talk of bearing up when the girl is going to marry a Baron, rich, and good-looking. And you crying as if the party was ugly enough to frighten his own shadow, and no prospect but beef sausages for a Sunday dinner!'

‘Do, miss, try and compose yourself,’ said the milliner. ‘It will soon be over. And we haven’t hardly an hour to get you ready for church.’

My effort to console her was unsuccessful, and I was pushed impatiently aside by Mrs. Gummer.

‘Your eyes will be red and swollen,’ said Janet, who was taking the necklace out of the jewel-box.

Whether it was the sight of the diamonds or the fear of the red eyes, I don’t know, but Nancy left off sobbing, and surrendered her head to the soft and greasy fingers of the Bond Street artist.

Presently, Colonel De Crespín came and chaffed me about my sadness.

‘Gummer, you are ungrateful. Here is one of your girls going to be capitally settled, and the other bespoken, and you are not cheerful. If the Baron had selected one of the Misses De Crespín I should have danced for joy, in spite of my feet being somewhat gouty. I had an offer for my eldest girl last week, from an eighty-thousand-pounder. His father was a tailor, and though the son has nothing to do with the business the name is left in the firm. So I was obliged to decline the bid. The *non olim* excuse will not cover a De Crespín marrying the son of a tailor. I am sorry for it, for the young man is unobjectionable, and it was not his fault that his father took to tailoring instead of to soap-boiling.’

At eleven o’clock we started for the church, cheered by a select crowd of Green Laners. Outside the church there was another enthusiastic crowd, and the

church was full of people who stared and whispered. The Baron, who wore two or three decorations, looked very grand. Nancy was pale, and cried whilst the Colonial Bishop, the rector, and the curate made her Baroness Incognitoff.

Whilst I stood for a minute in the porch waiting for the carriages to come up, I heard a lady say to her companion, 'No wonder the poor thing cries. She was engaged to marry a young man whom she loves, and is forced to marry this Baron because he is rich. I call her parents cruel and wicked.'

When driving home I told Mrs. Gummer what I had heard.

'And, Tom, it's well for that scandalising old tabby that I was not the hearer, for, though you are a Member and my Nancy is a Baroness, I should have demeaned myself by giving her a word which would have made her feel small. As for a girl crying her eyes out over getting married, it's common, Tom, as pickles with cold meat. Tears, as poor dear pa used to say, are not heart-blood, but eye-water, and they are more often turned on by temper or hysterics than by sorrow. Do you think a mother, who knows what it is to be married, couldn't cry enough to water a market-garden when she is giving up her daughter for better or worse until death do them part, and not knowing which of them will go first, or whether the man who is a turtle-dove in courting, won't be a hawk in married life? It is all a chance whether a husband is food or poison; but what is swallowed must be

endured, unless it comes to the Divorce Court, physic which is not a pleasant pill. But I won't give way, though a father may be gloomy, and make his daughter keep on crying until she looks like a red-nosed ferret, with inflamed eyes, set off by hearth-stoned cheeks.'

To my vexation, when I arrived at Corcyra Villa, I saw Mr. Busted on the lawn.

'I am here agin doctor's orders, my dear sir; but, as I says to the doctor, I am getting round, and I can't forbear going to the wedding of my member's daughter.'

Busted was in evening black. His elaborate shirt-front was decorated with cat's head studs and a huge sporting pin. He was strongly perfumed with hair-oil and patchouly.

What was I to do? If I did not keep Busted to breakfast he would be enraged, and at the next election I should be turned out of Marrowbone. If I kept him I should offend my aristocratic friends. I felt faint at the thought of a De Crespin sitting at table with a butcher.

I consulted O'Toddy, an Irish M. P.

'You see, O'Toddy, the Baron is a decent fellow, and would not mind it; but I believe that Colonel De Crespin would never forgive being set down with a butcher.'

'And what regiment does the gallant Busted belong to?'

'No nonsense, O'Toddy. I tell you that, though

Busted can return who he likes for Marrowbone, he is a butcher.'

'Bedad, it's a mighty fine distinction that, and from a Christian point of view, is a moral for Busted. For they are both in the slaughtering trade, do ye see, and when the butcher is at work he just kills sheep and oxen to feed his fellow-creatures, and when the soldier is at work he just kills his fellow-creatures for pay and promotion and to feast the crows. It will not be known that Busted is a butcher, though his hair looks uncommonly suety. Introduce him, Gummer, and I will take care that the slaughterer of sheep shan't tread on the tender corns of the slaughterer of men.'

In five minutes O'Toddy was persuading Busted to take a nip of whisky before breakfast.



'It's an appetiser and a digester, Mr. Busted, and as for your doctor not recommending whisky, did you ever hear of a butcher recommending his customers to eat poultry, or a poulterer recommending a diet of butcher's meat? Now, my dear Busted, you're just drowning the whisky, which is an indictable offence, and

a double manslaughter with malice aforethought, and torment afterwards. When you can taste the water the spirit is spoilt, and so is your liver. That is the dose, my dear boy. Now, that will fortify the stomach. And the stomach is a poor, weak thing with

an awful temper. It is irritated and put out with trifles. Whisky is the whip and also the sweetener. If you want a young Busted to digest anything, from a flat-iron to a bullet, feed him, as I was fed, on whisky-milk, taken direct from the cow. No, my dear Busted, it is not whisky mixed with milk that I speak of, and on what I was reared, but pure cow whisky. Your cow, being a thirsty creature, wants water pretty often, and a pailful is only a nip for her. When she wants drink give her whisky, and what is the consequence? My dear Busted, her milk is the finest overproof whisky.'

Before O'Toddy stopped talking he had insinuated two glasses of whisky down the throat of Busted, and I thought that the butcher was in safe custody. So he was, barring his tongue.

Considering that the party was small—only twenty-two, including Busted—and also that it was aristocratic and professional, with the exception of Busted, the noise was excessive. I tried to be jolly, but I did not succeed. I pretended to laugh at one of O'Toddy's jokes, but anyone could hear that it was a sham laugh.

I do not remember the speeches. We invited the *Green Lanes Herald*, and, though that gentleman did not use a note-book, he reported the speeches. From the *Herald* I learnt that I spoke about three-quarters of a column in reply to the health of the bride's parents, and that I had quoted from Horace, though I had never read a line of that ancient verse writer. The *Green Lanes Herald* passed over the little confusion caused by Busted. That dreadful person got upon his

legs—or, rather, the soles of his feet—and could not be pulled down by O'Toddy. He insisted upon proposing my health a second time as 'Our esteemed member.' His voice was affected by the mixture of whisky, sherry, and champagne. His language was not particularly refined, and Colonel De Crespin muttered, 'What a brute,' when Busted said, 'I puts who I likes in for Marrowbone, being the borough in which I was born and bred, and my father before me, and I am proud of what I've done for our hon. member, and I'll be blowed if Gummer shall ever be put out whilst Busted is hisself.' But the horror of the gallant Colonel cannot be described when Busted added, 'I don't talk shop when I am out of it, but Nathaniel Busted ain't ashamed of being a butcher, and I should like to see the party as can lick my mutton or beat my beef. And I tell the Baron that Busted the purveyor, or the butcher, which is the downright English word for my line, has put his wife's father in the Commons, and is the party as can keep him there for Marrowbone.' At this point, O'Toddy accidentally kicked Busted's leg, and put a stop to the speech. The bride, attended by all the ladies, left the room for the journey. The Colonel was calmed by O'Toddy telling him that Busted had been joking, and that he was an absentee Irish landlord and the lineal descendant of the last King of Derry. As Busted was snoring on the couch, he could not contradict O'Toddy.

Then O'Toddy insisted upon one more bumper to



From the Emperor.

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the health of the Baron. He made a long and poetical speech. He referred to the peerless beauty and the angelic soul of Nancy. He spoke of my friendship for Ireland, and assured the Baron that the name of the husband, the noble husband, of Ireland's friend, the name of Incognitoff, was engraved upon his heart's core.

Whilst O'Toddy was speaking, I heard the door, to which my back was turned, opened, and I saw the Baron start, then become pale — or rather, a pallid green. As I rose to ask the Baron if he was unwell, a gentleman, a stranger, walked up to the Baron and spoke to him in a foreign language. The Baron got up, and saying to me, in a whisper, 'He is from the Emperor,' left the room arm-in-arm with the Emperor's gentleman.

I suppose I looked scared, for the Colonel asked me if I felt faint. He and the company thought that the Baron had gone with one of his people to arrange for the journey. I explained that I was rather startled at a gentleman from the Emperor of Russia coming to the Baron at that moment.

'Bedad, Gummer, the Emperor is going to make your daughter a duchess,' said O'Toddy.

'His Imperial Majesty has sent his congratulations and a well-filled jewel-case,' said the Colonel.

I was thinking of the Emperor's opposition to the marriage, and fearing that he might punish the Baron by confiscating his estates.

James came and told me that the Baron wished to see me in the study.

‘Ask the gentleman to join us,’ said O’Toddy, ‘and we will drink his health, and ditto of the Emperor, in bumpers and with musical honours. Faith, the snore of Busted will be a fine bass.’

In the study I found the Baron, the Emperor’s gentleman, and two others strangers.

‘My dear Mr. Gummer, this is a most painful business. My august Master has sent me an order to go to—but I must not name the place or the mission—instantly. He does not permit an hour’s delay.’

‘But, Baron, it is simply impossible. If the Emperor knew that you were married to-day he would not expect you to set out on a mission.’

‘The Emperor may or may not know it,’ said the Baron, significantly; ‘but the order is peremptory. It must be obeyed if it cost me my life.’

The Emperor’s gentleman took out his watch and spoke to the Baron in French.

‘It is a business of such importance that the destinies of empires depend upon promptness. An express train awaits us. I am in agony that I must leave my bride, and that I cannot even say farewell.’

I was so dismayed, so stunned, that I could not gather my thoughts.

‘I will speak to the Colonel,’ said I.

One of the strangers moved and stood before the door.

‘The orders of my august Master must not be questioned. Tell Nancy——’

‘But you will see her before you go,’ exclaimed I, in alarm.

‘To torture her! To torture myself! No, I must go. I must go now. The express waits. I must go. Farewell. I will write. I will return soon.’

‘Surely, sir,’ said I, speaking to the Emperor’s gentleman, ‘you will not insist upon the Baron leaving in such haste?’

The Emperor’s gentleman shrugged his shoulders and spoke to the Baron in French. I did not know what he said, but I thought he was angry.

‘Well then, be it as you wish, my dear Mr. Gummer, my dear and most venerated papa-in-law. Go to Nancy. Prepare her for a short parting. I will wait here, but not for longer than a quarter of an hour.’

I left the room, but not to go to Nancy. I went to Colonel De Crespin.

‘Where’s the Russ,’ asked O’Toddy. ‘Anyhow, the Baron shall not get off the parting glass.’

Busted stopped his snoring for a moment to ask — with a very unparliamentary exclamation — for ‘branded shoda.’

I called the Colonel aside and told him what had happened. It was three or four minutes before he could understand the affair.

‘Gummer, some arrangement must be made. If the Baron must go it is better for the Baroness to accompany him. Come, let us see the Baron without a moment’s delay, for the ladies will be down directly.’

We went to the study.

It was empty.

‘He has gone!’

‘Gone! Nonsense,’ said the Colonel, ringing the bell.

‘Where’s the Baron?’ he asked of James.

‘Please, sir, I don’t know.’

Upon further inquiry, we ascertained that the three gentlemen and the Baron had driven away in one of the carriages.

‘Gummer, it’s my good sword against a peacock’s feather that the Baron has got into a fix with his Emperor. Been talking about the rights of man, or some treasonable stuff, and is haled back to be reprimanded, or sent for a year to garrison a hut in Siberia. The Baron is not the man I took him for. Do you think I would have left a bride to put myself in the bear’s grip?’

‘His estates, Colonel.’

‘Yes, to be sure. He goes to save them, and there is also the wonderful force of discipline. A Russian is taught from his infancy to obey the Emperor, and obedience becomes an irresistible impulse. But what shall we do, Gummer? Dear me, here they are, coming downstairs?’

‘We had better break it to them here, Colonel.’

‘Confound it, Gummer, bear it like a man! We shall have an awful scene.’

The Colonel opened the door, and asked Mrs. Gummer, Nancy, and Janet to come into the room. He told the other ladies that he would be with them in a few minutes. There was a general chorus of

‘Oh, what’s the matter?’ The Colonel did not reply, but shut the door, and locked it on the inside.

There was a scene, but, after all, it was not so bad as might have been expected. Janet sat down, cried, called the Emperor a wretch, and the Baron a coward. Mrs. Gummer raved about letting the Baron go, was sure he was taken away to be assassinated, and declared she would go after him, and bring him back. Then, overcome with fatigue and excitement, she had to lie on the couch in a fainting condition. When Nancy came into the room she was crying, but directly after hearing the distressing news, she left off crying, and was wonderfully composed.

Presently I went to the guests and told them that the Baron had been summoned to the Continent on Imperial business, and that the Baroness would remain with us for a few days. The ladies greeted the announcement with a chorus of little screams. The gentlemen shook their heads and talked to each other in whispers.

‘The family is naturally discomposed by the incident,’ said the Colonel, ‘and we had all of us better retire.’

We were soon left alone. Busted, fortunately, had been sleeping soundly, and he was awakened and taken away by O’Toddy without being told of the event.

The marriage, and all connected with it, seemed like a dream. Mrs. Gummer consoled herself by the thought that the Baron would get away from the wretches and return. Janet was cross because she

was sure that the De Crespins would think it strange. Nancy changed her dress and amused herself with some fancy-work.

At midnight, Mrs. Gummer, who had been listening to the sound of the passing carriages, and frequently startling Nancy by exclaiming 'Here he is,' gave up expecting the Baron until the next day.

'He will not come so late. And we are all so tired. Janet, you and the Baroness had better go to bed.'

'Oh, ma dear, pray, pray don't call me by that name. Oh, pray do call me Nancy.'

'My dear, to your own mother and to your own father, and likewise to your own sister, you are Nancy in private. But otherwise you are Baroness Incognitoff, and all the Emperors on earth can't untie the knot that has been tied by the Bishop, assisted by our own rector and our own curate. And I have told the servants, my dear, that the first one that forgets to call you "your ladyship" will go without warning and without wages. The Emperor may kidnap your Baron, but he cannot rob you of your Baroness-ship.'

CHAPTER XXI.

A SLIP OF THE PEN.

‘EVEN this is written under the inspection of four pairs of cruel Imperial officers’ eyes. I dare not mention a name. The E. is enraged about my m. with N. It will, I trust, be arranged in a few weeks. For all our sakes keep things quiet as possible till you see me. Life and estates depend upon it. I shall send a few lines to N. by this post. I bear my trouble like a man, but feel it like a tender woman on account of N. I shall pull through, if you keep the affair quiet for a week or two. If it gets into the papers the E. will be furious, and then farewell for ever. Farewell to honour, to estates, to my precious angel, to her illustrious pa, and to her dearly cherished ma.

‘ Your most faithful,

‘ RUDOLF.

‘ P.S.—What would your dear, departed cousin have said if he had seen the trouble of his adopted son? I believe he would have gone to St. P. and bearded the E. But, keep my affair quiet for a fortnight and

we shall once more be a happy, loving, and united family circle.'

The foregoing letter from the Baron, dated from Paris and bearing the Paris post-mark, came to hand the second day after the wedding. Mrs. Gummer—who had insisted that the Baron had been assassinated, and who said it was a shame to have our blinds up, and not to go to the police, which we should have done but for the urgent advice of Colonel De Crespín—embraced Nancy after hearing the letter read and called for smelling-salts. Janet, who understands her mother's constitution, gave her some cold brandy-and-water.

'I knew that we should hear from him,' said Mrs. Gummer, although a few minutes ago she had declared that he was dead. 'And to think of his remembering his mother-in-law with Imperial officers' eyes glaring at him! Nancy, you are a happy girl!'

Nancy, who did not look particularly pleased, remarked that no letter had come to her by the same post.

'Oh, you ungrateful and stone-hearted creature!' exclaimed Mrs. Gummer. 'How dare you find fault with your poor, dear, good, thoughtful, noble husband in the very midst of his enemies? Is the Baron his own Post-office, that he can help a letter being kept back by Imperial purloiners?'

'No, ma,' said Janet, with her usual pertness; 'but a man can help being taken out of a house as if he were a stupid sheep.'

‘And let me tell you, Miss Snapnose, and sorry am I to have a child with no more heart than a cabbage which is all outside leaves and stalk and not worth cooking,’ exclaimed Mrs. Gummer, ‘and I will tell you, whether you let me or not, and also I will tell it to your De Crespins, that though my son-in-law is battle-dored by an Emperor, who ought to be ashamed of himself, there is more sense and brain in the paring of his thumb-nail than in all the De Crespins’ heads put together. And, moreover, since you will have it, you shall have it, and I tell you, and I will swear it, that old De Crespin wouldn’t let us go to the police because he thought that if the Baron was murdered, I mean assassinated for that is what murderers do to kings and nobility, there would be more money for his made-up son.’

Janet was too angry to reply, and locked herself up in her room until it was time to meet Max at lunch.

Day after day passed without further news from the Baron. • To add to our annoyance some one invented a report that on our return from the church we found another Baroness Incognitoff, from Russia, disguised as a man, and that the Baron, to prevent exposure, went off with his first wife and left Nancy. We were so worried, vexed, and anxious about the Baron that, on the advice of Colonel de Crespin, I determined to call on the Russian Ambassador. I should have done so but for an event that for the moment almost made us forget the Baron.

We had a family dinner-party, that is, ourselves, and the De Crespins. Mr. Sparkes, jun., was expected from India in the course of a week, and we had agreed that the marriage of Janet and Max should take place without delay. The Colonel pleaded the devoted attachment of the young people, but I rather think that the fact of Janet having had two other offers, which fact Mrs. Gummer did not keep secret, had something to do with the Colonel's wish not to delay the marriage. The family dinner party was to celebrate the naming of the happy day.

The Colonel and the De Crespins generally were full of fun and jollity, and we were merrier over dinner than we had been for some time past. Nancy was not in good spirits, and Mrs. Gummer made her worse by calling her the Baroness. Likewise, under the circumstances, the talk about Janet's wedding, to take place in a fortnight, could not be exhilarating to her. Still, as Mrs. Gummer said, Nancy was not quite a November fog on us, but laughed a little at some of the Colonel's jokes.

We were talking of Busted. The Colonel had ascertained that O'Toddy had been jesting, and that Busted was a purveyor of meat, and not a slayer of men. I apologised for Busted's appearance at the wedding breakfast.

'My dear Gummer,' said the Colonel, 'if I could afford a seat in the House, and an influential supporter was a purveyor of meat for domestic quadrupeds, I should make him welcome to Grammont Lodge.

Those who want the favour of King Mob must pay court to his beery or meaty majesty.'

Whilst the Colonel was speaking, James entered the room, and spoke to his mistress. She rose suddenly, and exclaimed—

'Gummer, young Sparkes has come home, and is in the drawing-room.'

'I am glad of it. Shall we ask him to join us in a glass of wine?'

'Really, Gummer, I can't put up with such aggravation. A party comes over with the fortune, the party being a lawyer, whose business it is to feather his nest by moulting birds that he gets into his net, and then, in the presence of those who are the same as our own flesh and blood, we are to pretend not to care, and to sit on a bed of torturing nettles whilst the young man drinks wine.'

'My dear,' said Mrs. de Crespin, 'the men are all alike. They pretend not to be curious or anxious, and they are a hundred times more curious than women.'

'You go to the lawyer, Gummer,' said the Colonel, 'and leave us to empty the decanters.'

'Tom, it's mints and mints of money, and the Colonel might go with us to help the counting.'

Mrs. Gummer seemed to think that Mr. Sparkes had brought the fortune with him in sovereigns.

'I don't suppose I shall be wanted,' said the Colonel, 'but, if so, I am at your service, though it is hard to leave your ancient port.'

‘Come with us, Colonel. We have no secrets from you.’

The Colonel emptied his glass, and offered his arm to Mrs. Gummer. I followed them into the drawing-room.

Mr. Sparkes shook hands with me and Mrs. Gummer, and was introduced to the Colonel.

‘Excuse a late visit, Mr. Gummer. I only reached London this afternoon, and my father thought I should at once communicate with you. He is not well, or he would have come with me.’

‘Hours and weather don’t much matter when there is money in the wind,’ said Mrs. Gummer.

Mr. Sparkes bowed, and Mrs. Gummer looked round the room.

‘I hope you have brought the fortune with you. We have been kept waiting and waiting, though our poor, dear relation had left everything ready to hand. Have you brought the fortune with you, I ask?’

‘Not exactly, madam. I remitted it through the bank, but the advices have arrived with me.’

‘And pray, Mr. Sparkes, junior, who told you to trust other people’s money to an outlandish bank?’

‘My dear Mrs. Gummer,’ said the Colonel, ‘permit me to remark that Mr. Sparkes has adopted the usual and safe course.’

‘Perhaps, Colonel, you have not heard the Baron tell about the breaking up of the Bungbaboo Bank, when the poor Nizam was swindled out of all his twenty wives’ best jewellery and waggon loads of sovereigns.’

‘Mrs. Gummer need not be in the least anxious. The bills for Mr. Gummer’s money are on an institution as solvent and as safe as the Bank of England.’

‘But what I want to know, and what Mr. Gummer wants to know, and what Colonel Crespin, who this day fortnight will be the father-in-law of our daughter, wants to know, is when and where we can lay hands upon the coin. When it comes to thousands upon thousands, people are not to be put off with banking and billing.’

Mr. Sparkes was playing with his watch-chain, and looked very uncomfortable. I could not make up my mind as to whether he was afraid of being found out in some trick, or whether he was tired after the travelling.

‘The drafts are payable at sight,’ said Mr. Sparkes. ‘Can I have a word with you in private, Mr. Gummer?’

Matilda jumped up sharply as a Jack-in-the-box, and thumped the table with the vigour of the butcher, Busted.

‘Mr. Sparkes, junior, I beg to tell you and moreover I will be on my oath to it that you can’t and you shan’t. Mr. Gummer has no secrets from his lawful wedded wife, I happening to be that party, nor from Colonel De Crespin, who, as I told you before and tell you again, is to be the father according to the law of our second daughter.’

‘But, my dear Mrs. Gummer,’ said the Colonel, ‘you are rather severe on Mr. Sparkes. Allow me to

retire, and then, if you like, you can tell me the secrets afterwards.'

'No, Colonel, you shan't retire. As for being hard on Mr. Sparkes, junior, I don't mean to be hard on anyone, but I don't profess to be a saint, and I am not sure that an angel, if she had the feelings of a woman, would like to hear a party propose to speak in private to her husband about the family fortune.'

'I need not ask you, Mr. Sparkes,' said I, 'if you found all the things in order?'

'Not exactly,' said Mrs. Gummer, 'seeing that poor dear Joseph wrote to say he had arranged everything for his own flesh and blood.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Sparkes, still playing with his watch-chain and looking most uncomfortable, 'everything was in order. Most of the property was in immediately marketable securities, and I realised according to my instructions.'

'No report could be more satisfactory,' said the Colonel. 'If people who have property to bequeath only knew the comfort they give by leaving their estates in order, others would follow the example of your excellent relation. Unless there is something very special to communicate, I propose an adjournment to the old port, which Mr. Sparkes will find an excellent pull up after his journey.'

I remember that moment as if I were talking about what happened an hour ago. I was looking at Sparkes, and the gaiety of the Colonel seemed to me shocking, as would be laughter at a funeral. Sparkes

was pale—paler than when we came into the room—and his face expressed hesitation and distress.

‘Mr. Gummer,’ he said, in a half whisper, ‘what I have to say is not pleasant, but private.’

The Colonel rose, and Mrs. Gummer held him by the arm.

‘No, Colonel, you shan’t go,’ she exclaimed. ‘We know all about the at least quarter of a million sterling—which, let me tell Mr. Sparkes, jun., has been in all the papers—and we are not to be put off with a paltry two hundred thousand. If he meant what was right, why should he be afraid of a witness? No, Mr. Sparkes, jun., I tell you that the Colonel does not go.’

‘That delusion is worse than the mistake,’ said Mr. Sparkes. ‘What is this monstrous story of a quarter of a million?’

I could not help a groan. The words of Mr. Sparkes brought to my mind the fact that for the greatness of the fortune there was no warrant but the *Green Lanes Herald* paragraph and our assent to the report. •

‘Oh, very monstrous indeed, but it don’t happen to be a story, Mr. Sparkes, jun.,’ said Mrs. Gummer, with a sneer. ‘For a reason that would be seen by a blind man who couldn’t see through a brick wall, old Mr. Sparkes told us at first that the fortune was not much over a paltry £40,000. But the papers pretty soon let out the truth about its being not less than a quarter of a million, and that plot to rob us and our poor, dear girls was uprooted in its bud. Of course,

it's natural for birds to peck at fruit, but this fruit happens to be equal to the peckers.'

Mr. Sparkes fixed his eyes on me, and said :

'Mr. Gummer, do you support the statement of Mrs. Gummer? However that may be, it is better for my firm to communicate with you by letter.'

'By all means, Mr. Sparkes. It will be much better to write.'

I was glad of putting off what I felt was to be an unpleasant announcement. I had no doubt that we had been deceived as to the amount of the fortune. What should I do if it were only £100,000? What would become of me if it were only the first-named £40,000?

'And why should he go off without saying what he has got to say? Which won't come to much when it is said.'

Mrs. Gummer told me long afterwards that she thought the lawyers had plotted between them to cheat us out of £10,000. Why she hit upon that sum is a mystery. Perhaps it was because in the old days, before we thought of the great fortune, we always wished for £10,000. When we had only £2000, and no prospect of doubling that sum, £10,000 seemed to us an ample fortune.

'There appears to be some little misunderstanding, Mr. Sparkes,' said the Colonel.

'The matter can be soon explained. My duty, Mr. Gummer, is painful. In the letter of advice from Messrs. Leopard and Co., of Calcutta, it was stated

that your late uncle's fortune was worth about £40,000. Mr. Gummer, the clerk who wrote that letter made a serious mistake. He put pounds for rupees.'

'What, rupees? 40,000 rupees!' shouted the Colonel.

'Rupees for pounds!' I muttered.

'Well, and what of the rubies, Mr. Sparkes, jun.?' asked Mrs. Gummer, who knew nothing about rupees, or any other foreign money.

'I said rupees, madam. I hasten to add that your uncle's property was under-estimated at 40,000 rupees, and that it will realise about £15,000 sterling.'

'Rupees and £15,000! Oh, Gummer, Colonel, will nobody tell me what it means?'

'Madam,' said Mr. Sparkes, 'a rupee is Indian currency, and is worth about two shillings. Therefore Messrs. Leopard and Co. estimated the property at about £4000 and not £40,000. Your late relative had investments they did not know of, and the property has realised £15,000.'

The Colonel hissed an oath. Mrs. Gummer stared at Sparkes with her mouth opened and her hands clenched. I could neither move nor speak. We heard laughter in the dining-room, and the sound of it made me shudder. Mrs. Gummer was the first to speak.

'Oh, you robber! Gummer, Colonel, Max, don't let them rob us and trample on us! Rupees! Police! Send for the police. Colonel, send for the police. Oh, you rupee robber. The fortune or the police?'

‘I should like to know, sir,’ said the Colonel, speaking to Mr. Sparkes, ‘if Mr. Gummer knew that the estimated value of the fortune was £40,000?’

‘Certainly. Both Mr. and Mrs. Gummer read our correspondent’s letter.’

‘Then, sir, there is no ground whatever for these people asserting that the fortune was a quarter of a million sterling?’

‘No ground whatever. I came here to tell Mr. Gummer of the strange and serious mistake of Leopard’s clerk writing pounds instead of rupees, and I hoped that it would be some consolation to tell him that there was also a miscalculation as to the value of the property in rupees, and that he has inherited about £15,000. The delusion about the quarter of a million is inexplicable.’



‘I do not think it is inexplicable,’ said the Colonel, looking at me whilst he spoke to Sparkes. ‘It is a daring and monstrous imposition.’

I was still speechless. Mrs.

Gummer screamed violently, and the girls and the De Crespins came into the room.

What followed cannot be described. Everybody was asking what was the matter. Mrs. Gummer continued to shout 'Rupees!' and 'Police!' Mr. Sparkes spoke to the Colonel and left the room. The Colonel spoke to Mrs. De Crespins, his daughters, and his son, and they left the room. Janet called to Max, but he did not heed her. The Colonel crossed the room to where I stood and put his face so close to mine that I felt his hot breath, and his words seemed like daggers that wounded me and were left rankling in my heart.

'I think, and I hope, that the law can punish you. I will spare neither time nor money to get you a spell of penal servitude. You are a debased scoundrel, but you act well. The acting of your wife is overdone. But your perfect acting will not save you. You vile impostor!'

The Colonel left the room, and in a minute we heard the street-door opened and shut.

'Do speak, pa. Tell us what has happened,' said Nancy. •

I looked at Janet and wanted to say a word of comfort. I spoke in a low whisper:

'Don't despair, my dear one; oh, pray don't despair!'

CHAPTER XXII.

UNDER A CLOUD.

‘BUT what is the matter, pa?’ asked Janet. ‘It is cruel not to tell us.’

‘It’s rupees,’ moaned Mrs. Gummer. ‘Sparkes has taken all the fortune, and gives us rupees. Oh, Tom, where are the police? Where is Newgate? Police! police! Newgate! Newgate! Oh, Gummer? because a thief has unawares got his hand in your pocket, does it follow that we are to be robbed like lambs, seeing that we have the poor dear girls to look after? Oh, Gummer, don’t let a thief blight and tomahawk their prospects! Do send for the police! Do, do, do! Oh, send for the police, and save us from the rupees! Stop, thief! Police! Newgate!’

The girls were not very much enlightened by the exclamations of their mother.

‘What has happened? Pa, pray tell us.’

I told them of the mistake of the Calcutta clerk.

‘Oh, Gummer, that I should live to hear you insult a relation who is dead and not here to defend himself. As if your poor dear cousin, when he was writing his will, would cheat his own flesh and blood with rupees.’

‘According to Sparkes,’ I said, ‘my Cousin Joseph has not left a quarter of a million, or even £40,000, but about £15,000.’

‘Can it be true, pa?’ asked Nancy.

‘No, Nancy dear, it is not true. No, Janet, it is not true. No, my poor, defrauded offsprings, it is not true. For you are my own offsprings, and all the Sparkeses in the world can’t unmother you! Gummer, say it is not true, and send for the police. Do, do, do! Police, police! Newgate!’

When Mrs. Gummer became calmer, we talked the matter over. Was it likely that a clerk would be so stupid as to put rupees for pounds? Absurd. Was it likely that the English papers would publish a statement that was not true? Impossible. Was it not likely that Sparkes and the Leopards would try to rob us? Nothing more likely. Could we suppose that Cousin Joseph, who was one of the richest merchants in the capital of our Indian empire—these were the very words of the *Green Lanes Herald*—would die worth no more than a paltry £15,000? Ridiculous.

So we agreed that Sparkes was trying to rob us. In our hearts we did not believe this, and we feared the worst. But it was a comfort to be able to say to each other that the bad news could not be true.

What was to be done? Mrs. Gummer advised giving the Sparkeses into custody, and having them locked up in Newgate. I proposed to call on Sparkes, but Mrs. Gummer would not hear of my ‘walking into

a den of thieves with my eyes open, and thrusting my family's prospects down the lion's throat.' I suggested calling on my old employers, Purrem and Mangles, telling them the case, and asking them to act for me. That plan was approved.

'And sorry am I, Gummer, that, as the mother of my own born children, I was not equal to my duty, and have given the job to Purrem and Mangles, and stood by the bridge which has been the bread and butter of our offsprings. If we had been in the hands of Purrem and Mangles, Tom, we should not have been knocked up with a fright that will make us feel low as cat-scared mice for months to come. Purrem and Mangles are honest, and they will save our fortune from the tomahawking Sparkses!'

It was the first time in twenty-five years that Mrs. Gummer had ever said a good word for Purrem and Mangles.

Although we pretended not to believe Sparkes, yet I think we all but gave up the quarter of a million fortune and tried not very successfully to still, believe in the original £40,000.

Nancy remarked that the Colonel would be vexed at our fortune being only £40,000.

'Then the snap-dragon old bear may just get un-vexed,' said Mrs. Gummer. 'He is not going to marry Janet, and Max would not care if Janet had not so much as an old shoe to her name.'

But though Mrs. Gummer spoke so confidently, she was anxious, and so was Nancy. But Janet had no

doubt, or thought of doubt. She had a pure, true womanly loving faith in the love of her lover.

‘Then there is the Baron,’ said Mrs. Gummer, ‘and nobody, not even his own lawful Baroness, seems to think of what he will feel. If he had been here, we should not have been robbed and defrauded before our open eyes.’

There was a quarrel about the Baron, then a quarrel about Max De Crespín, and then we went to bed. Mrs. Gummer slept and dreamt that the brokers were pulling the bed from under her.

We met at breakfast, and tried to appear calm. Presently the letter-bag was brought in. There was a letter from the De Crespín solicitor asking to whom he should send the draft of the marriage settlement. There was a letter from the house-decorators about the West-End mansion. There was an invitation card from the Prime Minister for a reception. There was a scrawl from Busted, asking himself to dine with me on his return from the seaside as he wanted to talk over most important borough business, ‘for, as I often says, it’s only after dinner that a Briton feels anyways equal to public business. The House itself is flat as cold mouton and teetotal lush until it has had its feed and its glass.’ There was a note from the Court milliner, informing Mrs. Gummer that the designs for the wedding-dresses were ready. Half the letters in the bag seemed to jeer at our downfall. We were still opening the letters when James came in to ask at what hour we should want the carriage.

‘Not this morning, James.’

‘Being ashamed of yourself is not the way to make other people think much of you,’ said Mrs. Gummer, after James had left the room. ‘Your Purrem may be five feet ten of good-nature, and your Mangles’ heart may be soft as swansdown, but, being human, they will not be less disposed towards you because you ride in your own carriage. As poor dear pa used to say, the man who thinks nothing of spending five pounds over a dinner to a rich friend prides himself on being mighty charitable if he gives a battered half-penny to the poor.’

Mrs. Gummer did not persuade me to use the carriage. My old employers received me very kindly, and they were both with me for nearly two hours. They showed me clearly the mistake we had made about the fortune, and urged me to at once settle any claims upon me, and then to come and talk to them about the fortune. Purrem went with me to Sparkes. Both father and son said they freely forgave Mrs. Gummer’s violence, for the disappointment was hard to bear.

‘But,’ said Mr. Sparkes, ‘I cannot understand about the quarter of a million. Well, Mr. Gummer, you have been travelling at a rattling pace, and Marrowbone must have cost you a round sum. I will help Mr. Purrem to get you out of the fire, and, so far as Sparkes and Son is concerned, there shall be no lawyers’ bill, except costs out of pocket.’

When I got home and told them that beyond



Janet said she had the headache, and wished to be alone and would go to her room.
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doubt the fortune was gone, Mrs. Gummer had an attack of moaning and spasms, and Nancy cried. Janet did not cry, and even said it was a shame to make so much fuss about the money. She was thinking of her lover, and not of the loss of fortune.

Janet had been expecting Max from nine o'clock in the morning, for she was sure he would come early. It was two o'clock, and he came not. Janet was full of excuses for him. She praised his considerate kindness. He would not call till after the usual hour, for fear we should think he was anxious about the fortune. At three o'clock Janet became uneasy. She was sure that he was ill, and feared to alarm her. James was sent with a note. The note was returned, with a message that Mr. Max De Crespín was out, and would not return to Grammont Lodge that day.

Brave Janet ! She could almost hate us for having a bad thought of Max ! He was obliged to go out with the Colonel, or the Colonel was keeping him prisoner. She knew how her poor Max was suffering.

Janet said she had the headache, and wished to be alone, and would go to her room. We agreed that the Colonel would try and stop the marriage, and Nancy was certain it would kill Janet.

‘But, pa, we have some money.’

‘I don’t know, Nancy. But if we get a few thousands from the wreck, that will not satisfy the Colonel. And what will the Baron say?’

‘Do not think of the Baron. If he never sees me

again it will not make me unhappy. But Janet loves Max, and she cannot be happy without him. Go to the Colonel, and tell him that Janet shall have all we possess.'

There was a sob, and Janet came in. She had not gone to her room, but had been listening to our conversation. She kissed Nancy again and again.

'Oh, dear Nancy, it's hard for you to give me all; but I shall die, and Max will die, if we are parted. But, no—I cannot take all from you.'

Mrs. Gummer beckoned me from the room.

'Go, Tom, and quickly, and do what Nancy says. And bring Max back with you. Do it very quickly, for the sake of our child.'

The Colonel saw me in the library. He did not shake hands with me, or offer me a seat. I told him we would give all we had to Max, that Janet was a noble girl, and that she loved his son.

'Not badly played, but it won't do, Mr. Gummer. As I told you last night, your acting is perfect, but you cannot impose on me. The mistake about the pounds and rupees was barely possible, though I am convinced you were aware that your cousin was not worth £40,000. We may waive that point, but we cannot waive the lie about the quarter of a million. Mr. Thomas Gummer, since you have the audacity to come here, I tell you, coolly and deliberately, you are a trickster. You have got off one daughter by trickery, but you don't succeed with the other. I now understand the sudden departure of the Baron.'

The insult stung me, but I thought of Janet and did not resent it. I saw that it would be impossible to convince anyone that I was innocent. I was mad with myself for so easily crediting the story of the quarter of a million.

‘How you expected to succeed,’ continued the Colonel, ‘is almost past comprehension. Perhaps you thought the marriage with my son might take place before the completion of the settlement, as it did with the unfortunate Baron. Possibly,



you think your acting and the acting of your daughter, and the paltry £7000 or £8000, will bribe us. Then you are a despicable fool as well as a vile rogue. And now go, and beware how you or any of your family dare again to address a De Crespin.’

As the Colonel concluded, he rang the bell, and passed out of the side-door.

For a long, long hour, I walked about. I dared not go home. What could I say to Janet? There was no hope, none whatever. If Janet died, it was the fault of her father. I had brought all this misery on my child by not contradicting the false report in the papers.

Janet, as soon as she saw me, said :

‘You need not tell me, pa. I know the worst. Read that.’

It was a note from Max :

‘After the discovery of the infamous attempt to trick me and my family, I need hardly tell you that our acquaintance will entirely cease. It is not likely that I shall meet you ; but if so, you will be pleased to take notice that I shall regard you as a stranger.’

Janet kept up wonderfully that evening. No crying, no hysterics, no complaining.

When bidding her good-night, Mrs. Gummer said :

‘My dear Janet, do not fret about the heartless villain.’

‘Ma, never say that again. Whoever speaks ill of him I must hate.’

Janet was about the next day, and for days. Still no crying, no hysterics, and no complaining ; but she did not eat, and Nancy told us she did not sleep. We had to call in Dr. Bungay. The doctor was kind to us, and sorry for our misfortune. He urged an immediate change of scene.

‘Tom,’ said Mrs. Gummer, ‘the doctor is right, and the sooner we take his prescription the better for the poor dear girl, who can never forget the wretch whilst she is in these hateful Green Lanes. Moreover, Tom, it will be better for all of us. Our life here has been like a dreadful dream after going to bed on a hot supper without a digester. This sort of gentility may be good, but not for us, Tom. If an eel had been taken out of the Thames, and laid on a bed of hothouse

flowers in a royal garden, that fish would have been unhappy and dying to be back in his native mud and water that wants filtering. It's the same with men as with fish, Tom, who never do so well as when they are breathing the element they were born to.'

Solomon had many wives, and most likely more than one clever woman amongst them. Depend upon it, some of the wisest proverbs were the inventions of his better halves. The pretty words about the virtuous wife, and the ugly words about possible rivals, are just what a wife would say. If Mrs. Gummer had lived in Solomon's days, and had been a Mrs. Solomon, she would have ruled in that establishment, and written a Book of Proverbs every day.

When any annoyances—and there were plenty of them—made me snappish, Mrs. Gummer would preach about the folly of being vexed.

'Some men, Gummer, never cut their wisdom teeth in this world. When you were up, you were lick-spittled; and now you are down, the lickspittlers spit at you. The lickspittling does harm you, if you care for it; and the other won't harm you, if you don't care for it.'

Our disappointment was the talk of the town, as if it had been placarded by a bill-sticker across the sky. The *Green Lanes Herald*, in large letters and lines wide apart, regretted 'to have to confirm the painful and astounding report as to an imposition respecting an amazing fortune, and to state that many persons would be heavy sufferers.' Why, it was this *Herald*

that set afloat the story of the large fortune ; and yet it turned round, and charged us with fraud !

The milkman was the first creditor who dunned us. His master had told him to ask for our little bill, as two of his cows had gone out of milk, and he had to buy fresh stock. The milkman was so astonished at the prompt payment of his account, that it was several minutes before he could screech ‘ Yoh !’

The butcher, who had insisted upon a half-yearly account, wrote to me on one of his billheads with a split skewer—and, like all butchers, with blue ink—to say that meat was such a price in the market, that he was drove to look for money from where it was his due. The baker was urgent for a settlement by reason of an unexpected call from his millers. The person from whom I hired the horses was panic-stricken. He arrived at Corecra Villa at ten o’clock at night. He had no wish to kick up a dust, but he wasn’t shoed yesterday, and hire for a season must be in advance, and there must be some sort of a security for valuable cattle. After a volley of abuse, he said he did not want to be hard upon me, but he would take his cattle and a month’s hiring. I closed with the bargain. Our coachman demanded three months’ wages ; and, when he put the coin into his pocket, remarked :

‘ It is the oddest five-wheel turn-out, and the most staggering pull-up on the haunches, I ever heerd on.’

James was fetched home by his mother.

‘ Poor she might be, and poor she were ; but no one could say of her, as said the truth, that she set up for

being what she did not have a right for to pretend to. Keeping her hands from picking and stealing was what she had done, and would do so long as there was breath in her body. There was people who made a meal of shame, and drank after it ; but thankful she was to be very different. A loss of wages, what was no more than the due of her boy James, was what they could not afford ; but that was better than his being in a service that would be a blight upon his character.'

This excellent creature, who smelt strongly of Jamaica rum, paused to rub her eyes with the corner of her apron. I gave her the wages due, and a month's money in lieu of notice. Like the milkman, she was astonished, and it took her a full minute to tie up the cash in a pocket-handkerchief.

'Mr. Gummer,' she said, putting her face unpleasantly near to mine, 'if you want a help in need, you will find it in me. I've known what it is to have everything took, and if you are wise, Mr. Gummer, you will put away what is valuable and can be moved without a van or even a shay-cart ; and that can be done at nights, under my shawl, without a soul suspecting what is going on.'

I asked the excellent rum-perfumed creature what she meant.

'Well, surely, Mr. Gummer, it isn't straight towards your own for to let your creditors put in upon every stick and stiver you have got. Your plate, and what can be moved by hand, ought to be pawned for trifles, and the tickets hid out of sight ; and when you

are through the Court, you will have something to fall back upon for next to nothing.'

This very honest person was disgusted when I ordered her to go about her business.

Mr. Lazarus, who had pointedly refused to let me have a bill for some bracelets presented to the Misses De Crespín, sent a man with a broken nose and a bullet-head, with orders to wait for the money or the goods. The husband of Madame, our milliner, came for her account.

'Sir, if it should be one Queen, Madame would say, "Votre Majestie, what you our terms call is *toujours argent content*," and from here where I am, me go not without des monies of Madame, *ma femme*.'

Long afterwards, looking over the bankers' book, I noticed that all the cheques I drew at this time were cashed immediately.

The churchwarden, a tea-dealer, wrote to say that he was informed we were about to leave the neighbourhood, and as there were numerous applications for pews, he should be pleased to have ours at his disposal, and would remit the balance of rent paid in advance.

Mrs. Gummer remarked :

'Miserable sinners who are not well off are not liked in the middle-aisle pews of a genteel church ; but, to my thinking, Gummer, many of your middle-aisle pews on earth will be glad of back gallery free seats in Heaven, and won't get even standing-room.'

'Matilda, if it were not for Janet, I would stick to

Corcyra Villa, keep the pew, and defy the Green Lanes gentility.'

'And I wouldn't. For, Gummer, aggravating hornets don't hurt the hornets so much as the aggravator. Crush a hornet, or fight shy of him; and if you are in a nest, get away how you can, and as quick as you can.'

Is it worth while to mention that the single curate visited us no more? When he met Nancy, he was so busy studying the clouds that he did not see her. Poor fellow! He had his bread to get, and he would have lost his curacy if he had been civil to people under a cloud.

By the advice of Mr. Purrem, I immediately got out of Parliament. The 'whip,' Sir Thomas Collicanus, was very polite. 'I am sorry to hear of your mishap. Let me know by-and-by how you are getting on. Yes, your solicitor is right. You had better leave the House. You shall have the Chiltern Hundreds.'

The next day the newspapers announced that Mr. Gummer had given up his seat for Marrowbone, and had accepted the stewardship of her Majesty's Chiltern Hundreds.

Mrs. Gummer saw the paragraph and was cheerful for the first time since hearing the bad news.

'Never again, Tom, will I say a word against the Government, not if we were poor-rated for the Royal Family and the nobility to swim in rivers of champagne at a guinea a bottle. To give a pick-up to a

party who has been knocked down by robbers is what I call gentlemanly. And let me tell you, Tom, that a steward gets pickings as well as pay. My dear ma's brother was in the line, and he used to lend money to his employer. As poor dear pa often said, the steward gets the cream and the owner the skim.'

I could not for days make Mrs. Gummer understand that there was no pay in connection with the stewardship of the Chiltern Hundreds, that the appointment was only a formality for getting out of Parliament, and that the appointment had to be resigned.

'But I would not resign, Gummer, and I would defy the Government to turn me out so long as I did my duty ; and if, as you say, there is nothing to do, you can't be accused of not doing your duty. As for pay, I would be paid ; and if the Government was obstinate and didn't pay for dunning I would serve it as it would serve you, if you didn't pay your taxes—that is, I would distress and broker it. Tom, this is not the time for you to be a steward for nothing, or to be resigning a Government place.'

The *Green Lanes Herald* was very severe. It said that a detected impostor ought to be disqualified for sitting in the House of Commons without any formality, that he ought to be kicked out and not let out through a back-door. After a Gummer using the Chiltern Hundreds, no other person would think of defiling himself by touching the stewardship.

Busted was at Margate to recruit his health, and so he did not immediately hear of my affair ; but when he

saw the announcement of my resignation, and the statement and comments of the *Green Lanes Herald*, which were copied into the *Electors' Spur*, he came to town, and, after a few inquiries, hastened to Corcyrá Villa. The electioneering butcher was puffing with rage, and therefore probably he did not see that I was more amused at his mortification than offended by his insolence.

'How dare you drag a public man from the sea where he is convalescing after an attack that would have took off nine men out of ten, and that would have knackered me but for my constitution and temperance? How dare you hoist a public man on the pinnacle of contempt, and like a traitor put your 'eel on the vitals of the party that took you up, and trample on the people's sacred cause of peace, progress, retrenchment, and reform? When I looked

in at the vestry there were shouts of "Gummer and Gammon." The walls of the leading borough is covered with squibs about Busted's Gammon, *alias* Gummer. Here is one of them, sir, which is a handbill chucked into my cab: "For Gammon,



wholesale and retail, go to the shop of Nathaniel Busted, butcher, or to his branch establishment, the Marrowbone Voters' Protection Association." The

Association is a heap of degraded offal in the sight of the enemy. The career of Nathaniel Busted, who has been from his cradle a Wat Tyler of the people's rights, is pole-axed. But I will have revenge.'

Here Busted paused. I pelted him with a lot of unpleasantly hard names, and threatened him with the poker. As he bolted off, at a wonderful pace, considering his recent illness and his fat, I called out, 'Go it, Butcher Busted! What's the price of gammon?' To this day, I feel spiteful when I think of that electioneering butcher.

The Green Lanes invented the most curious tales about us. The milkman told them to the servant, and the servant told them to Mrs. Gummer.

It was said that I had often been bankrupt, and that I had, on two or three occasions, been very nearly convicted of felony. I had forged my cousin's will; and when the evidence came over from India, I was to be tried at the Old Bailey. Mrs. Gummer never went to bed sober, and I was in the habit of beating her with my umbrella until her cries alarmed the neighbours. The girls were extravagant in their dress, and addicted to flirting. They came down to breakfast in silk stockings and white kid gloves, and it was hard work for the postman to deliver their love-letters. The unfortunate Baron Incognitoff would never be heard of again. He was buried in our coal-cellar.

Being under a cloud when you have enough to live comfortably, may, in some respects, be pleasant. Per-

haps kings who go into exile are the happier for the change. A retired king has all the luxuries of life. He has lost nothing but the cares of government and the risk of being shot. But to be down and without money is awful. It is like falling in a crowd, and you are pretty sure to be crushed.

To the snubbing there was one exception. Dr. Bungay was kinder than ever. He censured me for not contradicting the foolish report in the *Green Lanes Herald*, but he did not excuse the De Crespins. He urged me to bring an action against Max; but I could not make my girl's wasting sorrow a matter of law and money.

'Then, Mr. Gummer, horsewhip the young scamp; and, depend upon it, I won't plaister his wounds.'

'Gummer, the doctor means well; but we must not hurt the man our Janet loves, and maybe is dying for. No, Gummer—not if we were innocent as unborn lambs, which we are not. And mind you, Tom, if anything happens, it's most my fault for believing that paper, and forcing you to do likewise.'

'I can't think how Janet can still love that man.'

'Gummer, scores of times you have said that our little garden at Bow was the worst ground that spade could be put into. Yet beautiful flowers grew in it. And, Tom, if a flower grows in the worst of earth, don't it find the good that is in the worst of earth, and won't it die if it is torn away from the earth it's attached to, though it is the worst?'

Our other troubles were nothing compared to the

illness of Janet. Dr. Bungay said physic was useless, and the only chance for her was change of scene. Janet begged to be let alone ; but when I told her how ill her mother was, and that Nancy was ailing, she agreed to go to the seaside.

‘It’s natural, Tom, that she should not like leaving the place where she has been with him. It will be like burying the dead. But when the shock is over it will be better for her. She looks so lovely. I told Dr. Bungay of the beautiful flush on her cheek, and, as he pressed my hand, he said that was the signal of danger. Oh, Tom, of danger to our darling ! and all the fault of her wicked mother.’

CHAPTER XXIII.

BATE AND HIS FRIEND TRACEY.

MR. PURREM took rather a hopeful view of my financial position.

‘I think, Gummer, we shall be able to get out of the Hopsticks Hall estate without the loss of a sixpence. Your price was £80,000, and we have already a bid for £78,000. It will be hard if we cannot drive up the figure to the tune of two or three thousands. The three thousand lent to Baron Incognito is safe, for I have been to Orey, Comus, and Co., and Goar tells me that both advances are amply covered by the jewels. • Never mind about your faith in the Baron. In case of lending, faith in the borrower, whether he is a butcher, or a baron, or an emperor, should be limited to the value of the security. By the way, when do you expect the Baron?’

I had not told Purrem about the way of the Baron’s going, but only that he was on the Continent on important business.

‘We expect the Baron will be here in a day or two.’

‘Very well, Gummer, and when he comes I must see

him. In his position and yours he ought to return that £5000 promissory note, or else go halves. I dare say he will refuse, and so I count that as £5000 gone. Your M.P. business is another £3000 dead loss. The Kensington mansion contracts we shall get quit of for about £200. So, though you have spent money like a £50,000 rent-roll nobleman, I hope that when all is settled, and assuming that the Baron sticks to the £5000, you will have between £6000 and £7000. If you had not been lucky with the Hopsticks Hall estate, or if you had gone on for another six months, you would not have had a sixpence left, and, of course, involved. At least, I never knew a penniless man who was not in debt.'

Purrem's statement was consoling.

'You see, Tom,' said Matilda, 'we shan't be paupers, and with one girl married, and only one to keep. And if we had a mansion and a hall, we could only be in one house at a time, and if you have fifty rooms you can only be in one at a time, and if you have a hundred dresses you can only wear one at a time. Being drawn in a lord mayor's state-coach with sixteen horses, that can hardly carry their own fat, may please those who look on, but the riders would be more comfortable in a one-horse fly. Of course, Tom, I'm not glad we have lost the fortune, but I am glad we shall have plenty, though we cannot eat our plenty off gold plates, handed to us by flour-headed servants. A peacock would not like to lose his fine feathers, but he would be a stupid bird if he did not feel glad that

the misfortune of losing his tail did not also lose him his food and sunshine. And a peacock can enjoy the sunshine just as well without a set of gapers staring at his tail, which must be a trouble to carry.'

Altogether, we were much calmer and happier than could have been expected. Purrem wrote a letter to the *Green Lanes Herald*, which put a stop to its spiteful libelling. The De Crespins had left town. The fear of the poker kept Busted from Corcyravilla. In a week or two we were as unnoticed as we were before the fortune came. We longed to leave the Green Lanes, and we only waited for the return of the Baron to do so. Our one great anxiety was about Janet, but she did not appear to get worse, and we were confident that change of scene would restore her to health and happiness.

We resumed our old Bow habits. We dined at two o'clock, and called the meal dinner. We took tea at five o'clock. We supped at nine o'clock, and called the meal supper. The letter-bag was put away. Mrs. Gummer's fancy-work frame was also put away, and she took to mending. I returned to clay pipes, and smoked in the dining-room.

'It does me good to see you refronting a shirt, Matilda. It seems like old times.'

'And, Gummer, it's time I stitched the rust off my needles. There is a whole cupboard full of jobs. As for your shirts that cost pounds, what with glazing the fronts and the washing-powder that would rot paving-stones, which your swell washers will use, they have

gone to such tatters that most menders would give them up to the rag bag.'

Just then the street bell rang. Our servant—we only had one—was out for her holiday, and Nancy answered the door. We had reduced our establishment to one servant, not more for the sake of saving than to prevent gossip.

Nancy came into the dining-room and told me that two gentlemen wanted to see me. To her surprise and mine the visitors had followed her into the room.

'I beg pardon for the intrusion, Mr. Gummer, but I want a word on important business. My name is Bate, and this is my friend, Mr. Tracey.'

'I do not know you, sir, but I am at your service. Matilda, is the gas lighted in the study?'

'How do you know these parties wish to have a say in private? But, of course, if you have anything private, Nancy and I are not dining-room fixtures.'

'Do not leave us,' said Mr. Bate. 'Our business is not pleasant, but it is not private from Mrs. Gummer, nor from your daughter—I presume, your married daughter.'

'Yes, sir,' said Mrs. Gummer, 'this lady is the Baroness Incognitoff. But, Gummer,' said Matilda, not liking the manner of our visitors, 'Nancy and I will go to the drawing-room.'

'I think you had better not, for our business rather concerns the young lady.'

'You come from the Baron,' exclaimed Mrs. Gummer.

‘Not from that individual, have we, Tracey?’ asked Mr. Bate, putting an emphasis on the word from.

‘Not exactly from the party,’ said Mr. Tracey, also putting a strong emphasis on the from.

‘Then it’s about the Baron. You come from the Emperor of Russia. What has the cruel Emperor done to him?’

‘There, Tracey,’ said Mr. Bate, ‘what do you think of that?’

‘I never met with his superior nor with his equal, nor with an approach to him in the way of gag,’ said Mr. Tracey.

‘Will you, sir, be good enough to inform me of your business?’ I asked, by no means pleased with the conduct of the visitors.

‘You shall hear it, Mr. Gummer. But I tell you, I would not do it for pay if it were not also in the way of duty, and I know that is likewise the sentiment of my friend Mr. Tracey. But what will out will out, and it’s no use putting off a disagreeable.’

‘The Baron has been killed!’ screamed Mrs. Gummer.

‘No, mam; the party you refer to is alive. Just for half a second we will drop the Baron. Mr. Gummer, you may have read in the papers about an Englishman, named Henry Dab, who is locked up in Paris on a charge of forgery.’

‘Yes, I have read about that affair.’

‘Well, Mr. Gummer, Henry Dab, which is the correct name, has gone by more aliases than there are

days in the longest month. One of his aliases was Baron Incognitoff.'

'The wretch, to take the dear, good, persecuted Baron's name,' exclaimed Mrs. Gummer.

'Your good lady, Mr. Gummer, is about as far off the truth as due East is from due West. There is no Baron Incognitoff; that is to say, the Baron is a sham, and the Incognitoff an alias. The party who passed himself off as Baron Incognitoff is the identical Henry Dab. I am sorry for the young lady; but, lor, she has all her life before her, and some day her having been Mrs. Dab will be like a dream. In which hope I am sure my friend, Mr. Tracey, joins with all his heart.'

Nancy, not Baroness Incognitoff, but Mrs. Dab! My son-in-law not a Baron, but a Mr. Dab, and a felon! How we bore the news I don't know. Not for an instant did we doubt the word of Mr. Bate. We had been deceived. Our eyes were suddenly opened.

'Tom, take us to some foreign part, where no one who ever saw us or heard of us will ever see us or hear of us again. Oh, my poor Nancy!'

Presently Mr. Bate spoke.

'As for the young lady going to foreign parts, she need not be in the least alarm about being vexed and worried by the aforesaid Henry Dab, considering that he is in for all twenty years penal; and I am glad to see that the young lady is not a conniver with the party. In which feeling my friend, Mr. Tracey, is one with me.

Moreover, if so be we can make things pleasant, and save the young lady from a little annoyance, which is a great trouble to those who have never been in trouble, it will delight me and also my friend Mr. Tracey. Possession, without any attempt at concealment or disposing of the property, especially when the receiver is a wife who has evidently been duped, is not a crime unless you can prove guilty knowledge and connivance. I believe that is also your opinion, Tracey.'

'My identical,' said Mr. Tracey. 'Also, time is getting on, and we had better come to the point.'

'To the point I come, Tracey. Well, Mr. Gummer, you naturally ask in your mind, why am I and my friend Tracey, here, interrupting domestic harmony at an hour when respectable people are thinking of bed? Well, sir, I come to the point. Mr. Henry Dab, *alias* Baron Incognitoff, is also *alias* Claude Hamilton Deville. Well, Mr. Gummer, you must have heard of the diamond robbery in Paris nearly a year ago, for it was a neat job and a big haul, being to the tune of over £18,000, and it was in all the English papers. Yes, Mr. Gummer, the party who carried off that swag was the said *alias* Claude Hamilton' Deville, *alias* Baron Incognitoff, whose genuine name is Henry Dab. I am sorry for you and for the young lady, and also for your good lady, which is also the sentiment of my friend Mr. Tracey; but it is our duty to be unpleasant.'

‘The Baron stole the diamonds!’ I exclaimed, and I was startled at the hoarseness of my voice.

‘Yes, Mr. Gummer, that is as clear as that you are not me and I am not you. And where are the diamonds? Some of them may be sold, but a lot of them are not yet traced. Well, Mr. Gummer, we have been on the scent for a week, and what do we hear? We hear that the *alias* Baron Incognitoff gave some diamonds to your daughter. If those diamonds are part of the property stolen by Dab, *alias* Deville, *alias* Incognitoff, the law has a claim on them.’

‘The jewels are in my possession. I will fetch them to you.’

‘Tracey, we are giving Mr. Gummer trouble, which is not the less trouble because it is under warrant. Tracey, see if you can help Mr. Gummer.’

I knew what Mr. Bate meant, and suffered Mr. Tracey to accompany me to the dressing-room, in which was the iron safe. I opened it and took out the jewel-case.

‘Is this the lot?’ asked Mr. Tracey.

‘Yes. With the exception of two rings on my daughter’s fingers, the jewels in that case are the only gifts of Baron Incognitoff.’

As I passed down the stairs, Janet, who had gone to bed with a headache, called out :

‘Tell Nancy to come to me.’

‘She will be with you in a few minutes.’

I spoke cheerily, and then groaned.

‘Bear up, sir. I don’t think you will have any trouble in this affair: neither you nor your daughter.’

When we entered the drawing-room, Mr. Bate was mixing some spirits and water in a wine-glass.

‘I want your good lady to take a drop of stimulant.’

I put the case on the table, and then took a key from off my key-ring, and put that on the case. I went to Nancy and took two jewelled rings from her fingers, and laid them by the side of the case.

‘There are all his gifts.’

‘Mr. Gummer, you are acting fair and square, and if, when this business gets wind, anyone says a word to the contrary, your humble servant and his friend Tracey will swear in your favour in any court in the kingdom.’

Mr. Bate opened the case, and the jewels glittered in the gaslight. Mr. Bate and his friend took out the jewels and looked at them for some minutes. After speaking together in whispers, Mr. Bate put the jewels back into the case, and also the two rings.

‘Mrs. Gummer, the necklace corresponds with the description, and I have no doubt, and with my opinion my friend Mr. Tracey unanimously agrees, that these jewels are part of the great Paris robbery swag. The question is, what is to be done? We cannot leave the jewels here; not that we doubt we should find them here to-morrow as safe as if they were put into the Tower of London for custody. But business is business, and duty is duty, and duty says the jewels cannot

be left here. But why should you let us take them away? You don't know Bate, and you don't Tracey, and the warrant might be a dodge. Well, Mr. Gummer, you go with us to Scotland Yard, and see us deposit the jewels.'

'Let them take them, pa,' said Nancy.

'Certainly, the officers can take them.'

'Very well, Mr. Gummer. Then we must have an inventory signed by you or the young lady.'

When the inventory had been made and signed, Mr. Bate again locked the case and took up his hat.

'When and where shall we see you in the morning? It is my idea, Mr. Gummer, and my friend Mr. Tracey reciprocates the advice, that you ought to see your lawyer, and that you had better be with your lawyer at Scotland Yard at twelve sharp; or we will meet you at your lawyer's office at that hour.'

I made an appointment to meet them at Purrem and Mangles' at twelve o'clock. After that Bate and Tracey had a whispered conference.

'Look here, Mr. Gummer, and mind the caution. You are not bound to answer any question I put to you, but there is no harm in putting it, and Mr. Tracey thinks it ought to be put as between man and man. You see, Mr. Gummer, the lot in this case is only a little part of the swag. Well, it is all the party has given to your daughter. Did you ever hear of the party disposing of other jewels?'

'Yes, I did.'

Then I told about the deposit of diamonds at Orey, Comus, and Co.

‘What do you think of that, Tracey?’

‘That Mr. Gummer has done fair and square by us, and we will do fair and square by him.’

‘Mr. Tracey is right, Mr. Gummer. I am sorry you are in for three thousand on the stones, and if you will take my advice you will draw your balance at Orey, Comus, and Co., pretty close to-morrow morning, for they might turn crusty and give you a lot of bother about the introduction. We shall not be at the bankers’ before half after ten, which will give you time; for those who do square by us, we do ditto by them. To be sure, it was neat to nab him on his wedding-day. I wish, for the sake of the young lady, he had been had a few hours earlier. As for the officers conniving at the fib about the Emperor of Russia, why if he went off with them on the quiet it was all they wanted, and, of course, he paid them to get him off quiet. All big criminals like to retire from society genteelly.’

When Bate and Tracey had left, Janet entered the dining-room, and insisted upon being told what had happened.

Nancy sat by her side, holding her hand with her arm round her waist.

‘Don’t be grieved for me, dear Janet. I will bear it bravely.’

‘You bear it! You! I don’t wonder at my Max forsaking me, as my sister has married a felon.’

So saying, Janet pushed Nancy roughly from her and hastily left the room.

How that cruel and unjust retort of Janet embittered our sorrow !

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BARON'S DIAMONDS.

‘WHAT is the matter, Gummer? Is your daughter worse?’

That was Mr. Purrem's greeting. Janet was, we feared, worse; for she was sullen, would not speak, nor take food. Nancy was very ill, and so was Mrs. Gummer. But it was not illness I had to tell him of. When I left Matilda, she said to me, ‘Tom, it's dreadful, and I am so sorry for you. Not that we have done wrong, but it's the disgrace to Nancy and to us all. If Purrem and Mangles turn you out, it will be no wonder.’ I felt humiliated as I told Mr. Purrem all about the Baron. But he did not turn me out. As I sat with my elbow on the table, shading my face, he put his hand on my shoulder.

‘Gummer, there is no disgrace in misfortune, even when we are brought to grief by our own stupidity. We will pull you through. We will set you on your legs again. Every day lying rogues deceive honest men. It



is easy to lie, Gummer ; and it's human nature to be fooled. I shall call on you to-night, and have a talk to the wife, and tell her we shall get you out of the fix.'

Just then Mr. Bate came in.

'Gentlemen, sorry to be five minutes behind, but the jewels have detained me. You see, sir,' addressing Mr. Purrem, 'we wanted to know if they were the identical jewels, or some of them, and so we showed them this morning to a party who is over here on the business, and who can identify. He looked at them, then he did something to a big stone with his diamond ring, then he shrugged his shoulders and sneered, and was not particularly civil about our 'cuteness. What do you think put the party out ?'

'The jewels were not part of the stolen property,' said Mr. Purrem.

'That is right, Mr. Purrem ; but that is not the only bite, or the worst bite. That Dab, *alias* Incognitoff, *alias* Deville, tricked the young lady. Why, Mr. Gummer, they are not jewels. The setting is gold, but the stones are not stones, only French paste. If they had been real they would have been worth close on four thousand. As it is, the value is about a ten-pound note.'

'That trick does not hurt our client, Mr. Bate ?'

'Of course not, sir, for, on the contrary, it only shows how Mr. Gummer and his daughter have been victimised at every point. Moreover, a little intimation from Mr. Gummer has put us on the bulk of the plunder. The party from Paris, who knows all the

parties in the stone line, got hold of Mr. Minum, the party who does business for Orey, Comus, and Co., and putting it to him as a matter of business, asked him confidentially if the jewels he valued for the firm were worth a good £12,000. What did Mr. Minum say? That he had put them at a trifle over two-thirds as a security, and that he would not sell them for £14,000. They were worth all that, but might be worth a good deal more. I take it that Dab got rid of a few for bread and cheese, and made the plant on Orey, Comus, and Co., for the rest.'

'You have probably hit the mark, Mr. Bate,' said Mr. Purrem. 'And now to another matter. Have you done much in the bill way?'

Mr. Bate smiled.

'Mr. Purrem, you are not in the criminal line, or you wouldn't put that question. Why, I and Tracey have tracked more bills than the rest of our lot put together.'

'Then it is likely that you may serve us. The Baron not only got £3000 out of our client on the jewels at Orey, Comus, and Co., but also a promissory note at two months' date for £5000. We rather want to know where that promissory note is.'

'If it isn't across the sea the odds are I will get you information some time to-morrow.'

'That will do; and our client will stand a fifty for the information.'

When Mr. Bate left, we went round to Orey, Comus, and Co., to tell them the news. Sir Joseph Comus

was polite to Mr. Purrem, but unpleasantly cold to me.

‘Very kind of you to call, Mr. Purrem ; though we have already heard the queer story. Mr. Gummer brought Baron Incognitoff here, and introduced him to us as the bosom friend of his late cousin. It was on that introduction that we advanced the Baron £7000 on the security of some jewels. Mr. Gummer knows whether the Baron is an impostor, or was the bosom friend of his late respected cousin. I apprehend he could not be both, and I would rather not assume that Mr. Gummer falsely stated that the Baron was a friend of his cousin. It is very kind of you to give us a call, Mr. Purrem, but we are not anxious about our money.’

Mr. Purrem explained how I had been deceived by the Baron, and also the disappointment about the fortune.

‘We cannot be held in any degree responsible for the mistakes of Mr. Gummer. If we assumed for a moment that when Mr. Gummer introduced the Baron to us as a bosom friend of his late cousin that he had no authority for the statement, we should be compelled to draw a conclusion by no means complimentary to your client.’

‘You may shut your eyes to the fact of our client being deceived, and we cannot prevent your unpleasant conclusions. Mr. Gummer is a heavy loser by the Baron, and, unfortunately, he has given a greater proof of his faith in the impostor than by lending him money.’

'We will not enter into an argument, Mr. Purrem. You are one of our old and most respected customers, and we appreciate the annoyance you must feel at having introduced a customer who has led us into what may be an unpleasantness, though we are not likely to lose our money. Our legal adviser, Mr. Scrapewheel, has been here, and in his opinion our security is not in jeopardy.'

We left Sir Joseph, and I went home. Dr. Bungay was there, and he told me that Janet must be forthwith removed from Coreyra Villa.

'If she does not immediately have change of scene, her condition will become critical.'

We agreed to start in the morning, but another trouble prevented us.

Mr. Purrem came in the evening, according to his promise.

'Gummer, I want to have a few words in private with you, before I see your wife.'

I closed the dining-room door. I saw by his face that he had bad news.

'That scoundrel, the Baron, has got us into a painful, a most painful, muddle. We shall get out of it, but it will need all your pluck to pull through.'

'Has he got the money for the £5000 bill?'

'I suppose not, and if he has we shan't pay it. The fix is the advance on the jewels. For some reason or other, Orey, Comus, and Co. sent for their valuer to revalue the jewels. Gummer, they are sham.'

‘Impossible! How could their valuer, Mr. Minum, have been deceived?’

‘They allege he was not deceived. They say that at the time of making the advance the Baron objected to taking £7000, and that Mr. Goar handed him the case of jewels that had been valued by Minum. They say that you and the Baron had a consultation, and that the scoundrel then agreed to take the £7000, and that the case he handed to Goar was not the case he received from Goar. And, it is no use giving physic in sips, they say you connived at the fraud. Don’t be too cast down. We shall stand by you, and we shall get you out of the fix.’

I remembered all that had occurred when the advance was made. I saw that my acts justified suspicion.

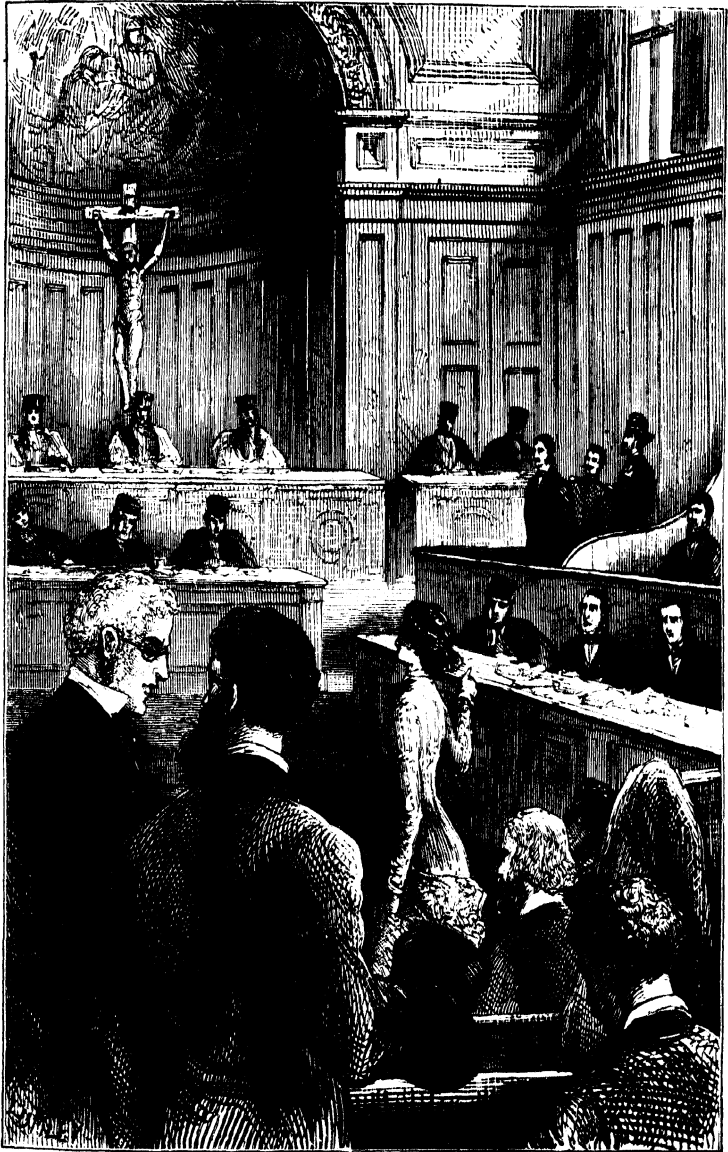
‘You see, Gummer, we can prove that the scoundrel had your £3000 cheque, and it will be for them to prove your collusion. But what is to be done? If Bate came here with a warrant for your arrest, it would not surprise me.’

‘You know he is coming!’ I exclaimed.

‘But, for all that, you must not be out to Bate. If we had a doubt about meeting the charge I should advise you to disappear; but there is no doubt, and you must meet the charge manfully.’

‘Have I not the money to pay these people? Any loss is better than such degradation. It will kill us.’

‘Perhaps you have the money; but how do you know that the Baron has not played you some other



I spoke so loud that there was a murmur in court.

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tricks? Besides, would not payment be a confession of guilt?

Mr. Purrem waited with us till midnight, but Mr. Bate did not arrive. The warrant had been obtained, but the prosecutor did not act upon it. Mr. Mangles had been with Mr. Scrapewheel, and shown him by my documents and papers that the charge against me could be disproved. But no tongue can tell the misery of that night, when, from hour to hour and from minute to minute, I expected to be arrested. Towards morning I dozed in the chair, for we had not thought of going to bed. I dreamt that I was being handcuffed, and woke with a cry. The dream affected me for many days. I distinctly felt the handcuffs on my wrists. A week afterwards I told Bate about my dream and the sensation of the handcuffs.

'Did you ever wear her Majesty's bracelets?' asked Bate, laughing.

'Never.'

'Then, Mr. Gummer, how do you know the feeling of that useful ornament?'



I was with Bate for several days. He went to Paris to give evidence at the trial of the Baron, and at Purrem's suggestion I went with him, on the chance of getting some information as to the £5000 bill.

When I saw the Baron in court I did not for the moment recognise him. Not that there was any change except that he was rather paler. But he did not look in the least like a Baron. Bate says that

every man in the dock looks like a felon. I wondered how we believed the stories about the Nizam of Bungbaboo and the Emperor of Russia. It was an awful thought that the criminal was my son-in-law.

The trial was tedious to me, as I did not know what was going on, except when a French detective, a friend of Bate's, interpreted a few words. However, I remained in court, as I could not get any information from the prisoner until the trial was over, and I was too unhappy for sight-seeing, and too restless to remain alone in the hotel.

On the second day of the trial, a woman was called as witness, and there was a laugh at her answer to the second or third question put to her.

'Ah, monsieur,' said the French detective to me, 'that is good, very good. She is asked if her name is Hortense Deville, and she says yes. She is asked if she swears that her name is Deville, and she replies, "How can a woman swear to the name of her husband? But I swear that the prisoner is my husband!"'

I laid my hand on the interpreter's arm.

'Who is her husband? Who is she? I do not understand. Pray tell me.'

'She is the wife of the prisoner, and he has so many *aliases* that she will not swear to her name.'

'His wife! That man's wife. Impossible!'

I spoke so loud that there was a murmur in court, and the interpreter put a finger on his lips.

I was silenced, and could not have spoken if I had

been allowed. Presently there was another laugh in court.

‘She is asked,’ explains my interpreter, ‘when she married him, and she replies about four years ago. Asked what was his occupation at the time of the marriage, she replies, “Living like a prince!” Asked if she knew how he obtained the means of living, she replies, “He showed me his estate on the map of Russia.” Asked if he had ever told her, or talked to her about the diamond robbery, she replies, “No. His conversation was always agreeable and respectable.” Asked if he was a good and faithful husband, she replies, “Yes, when he was with me.” And when he was not with madame? She replies, “He seldom forgot to send her the means of happiness.” Asked how much he sent her, she replies, “I did not keep an account. I am not a book-keeper. It was not more than I could spend.”’

Just then, Bate came into court and told me he had something to say to me.

We went to a café near the court.

‘Do you know that document?’ asked Bate, as soon as we were seated.

He handed me the £5000 bill.

‘From information sent by my friend Tracey, I went to a well-known dealer in queer bills. He denied having the bill. That I was prepared for. I then showed him that we had evidence of the bill having been sent to him, and I said that if he had parted with the bill it was the worse for him. As he could not

give me the bill, I should at once put the affair in the hands of the police. Thinks I, my clever fellow, this is not your first business with Dab *alias* Deville, so I tried a chance shot. Says I, "The bill won't be paid, and won't be compromised. But if it were a bank-note it might be a dear £5000 to a party who would be asked about real diamonds and also some sham ones." He swore, and raved, and threatened. Well, Mr. Gummer, at last he gave up the bill, and if you can swear to the document we had better make it safe.'

Bate called for a cigar. He struck a match, with the match he set light to the bill, with the bill he lighted the cigar, and held the burning paper until it was all consumed.

'Now, Mr. Gummer, that is my weakness, and also the weakness of my friend Tracey. We like safety when we can get it, and if you want to be secure against trouble about a document, burn the document. So, Mr. Gummer, your work is done, and you can leave as soon as you like, and I don't think being here is doing you any good. Why, you look scared! Are you not glad we have nabbed the bill? or did you want to keep it as a curiosity?'

I told him about the witness, Hortense Deville, the prisoner's wife.

'Can we prove that marriage? If so, my girl is not his wife. But is it true? Can you prove a legal marriage?'

Bate threw the cigar, the end of which he had been vigorously biting, under the table. He stood up and

for two or three minutes whistled—in a sort of whisper whistle—‘Rule Britannia,’ which was his habit whenever he was in deep thought.

‘Is it a legal marriage, Mr. Gummer? Of course it turns upon that, and that is what we have to find out. The sooner we are at work the better. You go to the hotel. In these affairs, Mr. Gummer, those who don’t help are sure to hinder. Dab *alias* Deville, when he gets a heavy sentence, and he is sure of it, may turn spiteful and sullen. If we can chat with the woman she may give the needful tips.’

Faintly whistling ‘Rule Britannia,’ Bate left the café, and it was late at night when he arrived at the hotel.

‘Least first, Mr. Gummer. Dab, *alias* Deville, *alias* Incognitoff, has got twenty years. He will appeal, but he will not get off an hour. When you catch a serpent, don’t let it loose in a hurry. And now for the important business. Mr. Gummer, it’s all right. Hortense is Dab’s lawful wife. The civil and religious ceremony took place in Paris, for they both fancied it was a fine catch, and took care to be fast bound. We shall have the needful papers in the morning. I am glad for your sake, also for the sake of the daughter, and of your good lady. Glad is no word for it, Mr. Gummer, and I know that my friend Tracey, who takes an interest in your case, will reciprocate my delight.’

Great was the pleasure and the relief when I returned to Corcyra Villa, and told them the good news.

‘Tom,’ said Matilda, ‘what are the feelings of a felon, I don’t know, for, as poor dear pa used to say when ma was galled into telling him he had no feeling for his family—only an oyster knows the feeling of an oyster when it feels the knife. But, Tom, it can’t be many worlds worse than the feelings of a mother who has a felon for a son-in-law. Oh, Tom, I felt that I never could hold up my head again, but must have gone through life with my eyes on the ground, as if earth was a magnet, and eyes were made of needle-steel. No, my own dear Nancy, you are not a sham baroness nor feloness. And it’s no thanks to your mother, whose heart may be tender, but whose judgment might shame the bird who is sent into the world without brains to be eaten with sage and onions.’

Mr. Purrem called on us an hour after my arrival.

‘Gummer, that is the best news I have heard for a long time. I did not see our way to a divorce; but they were not married, and we will easily get a decree of nullity.’

‘Thank you, Mr. Purrem; but we need not remind the public of our folly. Nancy will never marry.’

‘How do you know? And what has that to do with it? Nancy is free to marry without a declaration of nullity. But the supposed marriage with the scoundrel was advertised, and the nullity of the ceremony should also be published.’

Mr. Purrem set to work with vigour. He brought over the necessary witnesses from Paris, and obtained the declaration of nullity with unexampled quickness.

'Have you been in the profession all your life, Gummer, and yet don't know that the law's delay is nothing compared to the delay of the lawyers. If lawyers were paid by the job there would be fewer complaints of dilatory justice. As we are not going to concoct and compose a bill of costs in your case, there has been no lawyers' delay.'

In reply to a letter from Nancy, Mr. Purrem wrote, 'Do not thank Purrem and Mangles, but thank your father for a quarter of a century of zealous and faithful service.'

'And Mr. Purrem is right, Tom, for the donkey that carried the load, and not the one that helps him up when he is down, most deserves the carrot. But I feel like hugging the firm, for they have been good to us; and when I think how I used to find fault with Purrem and Mangles, I wish that my mind's eye had been longer sighted or had been helped with a telescope. One never knows how nice and good physic is till one is ill. I don't exactly mean that, Tom, for Purrem and Mangles is not physic. What I mean is, Tom, that, until you are drowning in a sea of trouble, you never know who is the friend to rescue you. As poor dear pa used to say, until the rainy day comes, you do not know who will lend you an umbrella to save you from a soaking and rheumatism. To be sure, Tom, in his last rainy days poor pa could not borrow an umbrella, not even a broken rib, cracked silk ventilator. But you see, Tom, he had been always a borrower and never a returner, and his friends were tired of the performance.'

CHAPTER XXV.

OUR GREATEST TRIAL.

‘GUMMER,’ said my wife, ‘perhaps we should bear troubles as they come better if we knew the worst that were to come, or at least what might come ; though it may be that having a tooth drawn is as bad as having a leg off whilst it’s being pulled, for pa used to say that most likely one pain is nearly as bad as another whilst you have it, and one pleasure as good as another whilst you enjoy it ; and that any pain, if it lasted, would kill, and that any pleasure, so long as you feel it, makes life happy. Do you remember, Tom, how I raved and cried and said most wicked things the night we heard that the fortune was not a fortune, but only a fine windfall ? Then, Tom, when we found that our girl was the wife not of a baron, but a felon, I was worse than before, and I thought it was an affliction sent for being so upset about the loss of money which had really never been ours. A foolish thought, Tom, for as poor dear pa used to say, Providence is not what fools suppose, and Providence don’t punish a wrong done to-day by making a right done to-morrow turn

out wrong. For as poor dear pa used also to observe, if a demon sowed wheat he would not reap tares, and if an angel sowed tares he would not reap wheat. And, Tom, when we were told you would have to go to prison, I forgot about Nancy. And now that our Janet is in such danger, oh dear! it seems like a punishment for taking other troubles to heart. Tom, we must not hope. But I cannot help hoping, Tom, even when I am despairing. But I know she will die, and what will you do? Oh, I wish the doctor would come.'

While Matilda was speaking, she was crying. Dr. Bungay came, saw Janet, and before going told us that our girl was in great danger. Mrs. Gummer asked him if there was no hope.

'There is still life, and therefore hope. It is not given to us to know the hour nor the day. But, my dear Mrs. Gummer, it is my duty to tell you that I have only a faint hope. Change may save her, but your comfort is that you are doing your best, and that what is best for your child will happen to her by the grace of the Almighty, who knows what is best for all His creatures.'

I never saw a woman so stricken with grief. Despite my crushing sorrow I could for the moment only think of her grief.

She neither wept nor moaned, and when she spoke, her hand in the doctor's hand, and her eyes fixed on his eyes, her voice was not tremulous, but very mournful and despairing.

‘You know she is dying, but you will not tell me. Doctor, the sin of the parent is visited on the child, and that is why my Janet is dying.’

The doctor, still holding her hand, said :

‘I do not know that she is dying. I have told you the worst. She may be spared to you, and if not I beseech you not to call the visitation to you an evil to her. The blossom that falls from the tree of this mortal life is garnered in Heaven. And you have a duty to fulfil, for your child yet lives, and may live, but the hope of her living will be less than it is if she sees you are grieved. For her sake you must try to hope, and to seem hopeful when you are with her.’

‘I will do so, doctor ! Indeed I will do so.’

And she was true to her word, and I was amazed how she concealed her sorrow from Janet.

‘Yes, Tom, I have such a feeling at my heart as if it was really weeping, Tom, and yet, oh so full, for all the weeping ; but when I am with our Janet my eyes shall be tearless.’

Next day it was a bright and gladsome July morning, and we left Corcyra Villa. Janet had been worse for two or three days, and she could only be moved from her bed to the sofa. She had no pain. Her head did not ache. She was only so tired and so weary. What she wanted was to rest, ever to rest. She did as we wished without complaining. When we gave her physic, she took it ; and when we urged her to take food, she ate and drank what she could. But neither the physic nor the food did her any good.

Day after day she became thinner. Her face, though thin, was very beautiful. Her eyes had grown larger, and shone with a strange light. She was very pale, but her cheeks were flushed, always flushed, and most so when she slept. It was not, as the doctor warned us, the flush of health, but the danger-signal. Still I did not know how ill she was until I found she could not walk. I carried her out of the house, and laid her on the seat of the carriage. It was like carrying a baby, and the nest-egg came into my throat, almost choking me. Dr. Bungay having told us to be cheerful, we tried to look cheerful whilst we were with her. As we drove from Corcyra Villa, we thought of what might be passing in her mind ; but she was calm, and leaning on me, and seemed to be dozing.

Dr. Bungay met us at the station. He had engaged an invalid carriage for us ; and, to our surprise and our joy, he said that he should go with us to the seaside, and see us settled. His kindness—his loving kindness—nearly overcame us. We could not thank him ; but I know we blessed him, and that whilst we live we shall love him for his love to us in our affliction.

When a dear one is very sick, and may be sick unto death, the doctor is an angel of hope and comfort to those who fear and mourn.

It was a long journey. All the way Janet had her hand in mine. Twice she was faint, and we thought the end was come ; but the good doctor never lost his courage. He gave her some stimulant, and she recovered. Her hand that she laid in mine was cold as

marble, and I could not warm it; and the cold of it struck to my heart.

It was distressing to look at Matilda. She did not talk; and whenever she had a chance of doing so unobserved by Janet she wiped her eyes. She was always a good mother, but never so gentle as now. It was very pitiable to see her staring in the face of the doctor, trying to find out what he thought about her darling.

The rooms that Dr. Bungay had hired for us were near the sea; and when the window of Janet's room was opened we could feel the fresh breeze, and hear the rolling of the waves, and the voices of the children playing on the beach. Next day the doctor returned to London. Other patients needed his care, and he told us that the physician could do nothing for our child—that we must be prepared for the worst, whilst we still hoped and prayed. When Dr. Bungay left us, we felt alone and helpless.

For more than a month our beloved was lying on her bed, and no change for the better. Still no pain whatever, only weariness, only the craving to rest, and to rest for ever. No crying, no complaining, and weaker every hour. Even now when I think of that time, the nest-egg comes into my throat.

Nearly the whole day long I sat by her, holding her hand. Not a tear, not a murmur. She was patient as a dying flower.

One afternoon she was sleeping. The sea-breeze that came in the open window played with her hair

that hung loose over the pillow, and her face was never more beautiful. She had become so like an angel. Her skin transparent, and the flush, bright as the flush of the sky when the sun is setting, upon her cheeks. No sign of suffering; but her face placid as the face of a sleeping child. As I looked, I felt sure that she could not live much longer, and that from one of her short, calm sleeps she would wake in Heaven. I could not pray for her life, but I wished that I could die with her; and as I knelt by her bed the sorrow that I had repressed for weeks broke forth, and as I cried she awoke.

Near to her she drew me, and clasped my neck tightly.

‘Pa, darling, I am very sorry for you; but I can’t help it, dear.’

I told her it was not her fault, but ours; and that it was the sinful pride of her parents that had caused her sorrow, suffering, and sickness. The flush on her cheeks deepened, and she pressed me still closer to her, and whispered:

‘Oh, my dear, do not say that; oh, do not say that.’

But I told her it was true, and that our hearts were breaking.

No words were spoken for some minutes, and I was in terror lest the excitement had killed her.

‘Pa, I have been very wicked. Darling, I will try to get well again. I have prayed to die, and now I will pray to live. Oh, pa dear, how cruel I have been to you!’

For the first time since her great sorrow she wept, and the bursting of the heavy cloud of grief saved her.

For from that hour she began to mend—at first, so slowly that we sometimes doubted if the blessed change had come in time; but after a fortnight our doubts were over. In the latter days of September she could go on the sands, and hour by hour the strength of her youth was renewed. The October evenings were cold, and the day was fixed for our return to London.

We were sitting round a blazing fire. The wind was rattling against the windows, and the sea was roaring; but the storm did not disturb us.

‘Now, Janet, for the secret. Now, Janet, to tell you why I have been so often to town, and what I have been doing.’

‘Janet will never guess,’ said Mrs. Gummer. ‘Girls are not half the guessers they were when I was young, and when, instead of fal-de-ral dancing, there were games of riddles, though I never was a riddler and always gave it up.’

‘We are not going to the Green Lanes, Janet,’ said I.

Janet smiled, and coloured slightly.

‘I could have gone even there without sorrow, but I like Bow better.’

‘But we are not going to Bow. Our new home is at Stratford. A pretty house, and a fine garden. I know it will please you.’

Janet said it was a happy surprise, and she was glad that ma and Nancy had kept the secret.

‘The fortune was a little more than was expected, the Hopsticks Estate has sold well, and so, Janet, we have what ma and I used to talk about as a fortune, we have £10,000, and a little over.’

‘And you will be with us all day long, pa?’

‘No, my dear,’ said Matilda. ‘Your pa goes back to the firm, and Purrem and Mangles will give him his articles, and after he is admitted, mark my word, Thomas Gummer will be Purrem and Mangles’s Co.’

‘No, Matilda, it’s only out of compliment and kindness they give me my articles. There is a young Purrem and a young Mangles, and no room for outsiders in the firm.’

It was a gladsome journey to town. We thought of the journey to the sea; and our happiness was a deep, deep, silent happiness. The first night at our new home was more joyous than any other night in our lives. The girls declared they were not tired; but Mrs. Gummer insisted upon their going to bed early, especially as it was Saturday, and therefore bath-night. Mrs. Gummer was mending, whilst I smoked, as in the old days at Bow.

‘With the tatters, the trimmings, and the buttons off, and one thing and the other, I have a year’s mending. Not that I grumble, Gummer, for without work I am a lost creature. Moreover, Tom, the best of us live by mending. What would become of the doctors, and the lawyers, and the parsons, if there was no mending? It is a world of mending, and we are sent into it to mend.’

Loud laughter from the girls' room.

'Pa and ma, what do you think?'

'You will catch such a cold out there on the landing!' exclaimed Mrs. Gummer.

'But what do you think? Such fun! Some one has hung up our stupid letter-bag in the clothes cupboard.'

'It will do for a rag-bag, my dears.'

And Mrs. Gummer's voice was drowned in a merry peal of laughter.

'Gummer, did you see those boys on stilts, staring at us and our luggage getting out of the cab?'

'Yes, and what of that, Matilda?'

'They set me thinking, Tom. Why do they like stilts? The breathing at six feet is no better than the breathing at three feet. It's play to boys, but what is stiling to grown-up people? It is stiling to go into spheres into which we were not born or grow into naturally; and those who go on stilts are only laughed at by the tall ones, and tripped up by the short ones. Falls are sure, and lucky if the stilters do not break their necks. We are none the worse for our tumble, Tom; but no thanks to ourselves, and no more stiling for Matilda Gummer.'



As I knelt by her bed the sorrow that I had repressed for weeks broke forth.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

P.S.

‘If having one’s own way and living longer go together, Thomas Gummer will dance at the gold-wedding of his great-great-great-granddaughter.’

Matilda did not look up from her work, a child’s pinafore, which she stitched as vigorously as if it were only a year or two after our honeymoon.

‘Some people may like finishing a dinner without pastry as a fill up, and cheese as a digester, but it is not my taste.’

‘Matilda, when I am told by an author that it will spoil our book, and be inartistic to add a word more after telling of our two turns of the wheel of fortune, it would be unwise to do so.’

‘Well, Tom, an author I am not, which may be none the worse for me, and none the better for the world; but a reader I have been, especially when I was a girl, and I never yet met with a tale, which our history will be to strangers, that left the readers guessing at what became of the parties. What would you think of theatre gas being turned off in the middle of the last act?’

‘My dear Matilda, there is nothing more to be told about the fortune.’

‘Tom, I suppose memory goes like teeth ; and if a false memory, like false teeth, is to be bought, you ought to buy one. Perhaps you think that when you have shown the eggs, people can see the birds that are hatched from them. No more to be told about the fortune ! Have you told about old De Crespın being chairman of a swindling company, and being tried and convicted ? Have you told that Thomas Gummer is the Co. in Purrem, Mangles, Sons, and Co. ?’

At that point Mrs. Gummer was interrupted by a little girl, a chubby four-years-old darling.

‘Oh, Gandma Jummer ! cousy Tom top of tee, and can’t tum down adain.’

Tom, two years older than his cousin, had climbed to the top of a plum tree, filled his pockets with fruit, and then feared to descend. I got a ladder and brought him to earth.

‘Dear me,’ said Mrs. Gummer, looking at the fruit, ‘some of the plums are bird-pecked and the others withered. Let this be a lesson for life, Tom. It isn’t always the fruit you have to climb the highest to get that is the best. You are not a monkey, my dear, and you shouldn’t be a climber.’

‘Then, gran, why does the fruit grow at the top of a tall tree ?’

‘For birds to peck at,’ said Mrs. Gummer. ‘And now, my dears, be off and play at horses.—Well, Tom, we were talking about the snap-you-up finish of our history.’

‘It is not our history, but the history of the fortune.’

‘And do you think that a good deal of what has happened since is not owing to the fortune? Though, to be sure, Tom, we must stop at some point at going back to causes, and from showing in our book all the bygones which caused all that has happened and is happening; for otherwise we might go on to give the lives of those who made India British, for if it had not been for India being British, Cousin Joseph would not have made a fortune there, and so we might go on backing and backing till we got past the time when there was no India to be made British, but only something to be made India. Why, Tom, if a thousand things had not happened as they did happen, ages, ages, and ages ago, how do we know that there would have been a Matilda Gummer stitching at a child’s frock which might almost as well be gummed together, for children’s frocks are outgrown as soon as put on unless they are tucked from top to toe. My view is, Tom, that everything that happens, from a battle of Waterloo to a child picking a daisy, would not have happened if everything else that has happened since the beginning of the world had not happened. But what I don’t like is, stopping a history as if what ought to follow is what you are ashamed of, and that I am sure we are not. Surely, you might tell how well the girls have——’



A scream in the garden. Little Tom and little Nancy were running over flower-beds in chase of a butterfly, and little Nancy stumbled against a prickly shrub.

‘To have the care of children is the same as being constantly blistered and galvanised. Trampling down beautiful flowers in trying to catch what is spoilt and worth nothing if it is caught, though, to be sure, it is human nature to do so, for, as my poor pa used to say, it don’t require sense or thought to destroy, and those who can’t make, can and do break. And, perhaps, little Nancy with thorns in her legs, and her mother will be blaming us for having such things in a garden, for Janet is such a fidget with her children, and thinks they want as close watching as boiling milk.’

Little Nancy had no thorns in her legs, but the children were hot, and so, to keep them still awhile, Matilda told them stories.

‘Once upon a time there lived a man named Greedy Sam. All the days of his life he had thought of nothing but saving money, and he never gave away so much as a crumb of bread. He was so greedy, my dears, that he would eat the whole of the biggest bunch of beautiful grapes without giving one to little children, who longed for a taste of the fruit. He grew to be very rich, and then he bought a big house in London, and a big house in the country. Was he happy? No, my dears. He said, “I have about fifty rooms, and I can only use one at a time; I have fifty coats, and I can only wear one at a time,

and I can buy a hundred dinners a day, and I can only eat one dinner ; and I can use for myself very little of all my money can buy. Oh, I am so miserable !” So he was unhappy, and died from fretting. My dears, never be like Greedy Sam, but like the bees which save their honey for the winter, and let others enjoy it. At least, my dears, you must be better than the bees, for they would not part with the honey they can’t eat, if they could help it. So there is some human nature in bees.’

‘Gandma Jummer, do tell us the tory of the wose-twee.’

‘Once upon a time there was a fine big rose-tree, and it ought to have been very happy, for it grew in a beautiful garden, and it was well cared for. But the rose-tree was proud and envious, and it used to say, “ Oh dear, I wish I was in a grand pot and lived in a grand glass-house, among the choice flowers !” ’

‘But, gran, can a tree talk ?’ asked Tom.

‘Yes, my dear ; in a story anything can talk. Well, one day the master of the house had a most beautiful flower-pot sent him as a present. So he told the gardener to put the fine rose-tree in it, and the tree was proud to be put into the beautiful pot and taken into the conservatory, that is the glass-house, my dears. Of course it hurt the tree to be moved, but pride, my dears, can bear smarts. Well, my dears, the tree was soon miserable, for all the guests who came into the conservatory admired the pot, which was worth a hundred pounds, and took no notice of the tree.

The tree said, "Ah, when I was in the garden my roses were admired, but now I am only looked at for the sake of the pot I stand in!" The tree had not air enough, and its root was cramped by the pot, and it withered and died.'

'I like the story of the peacock and lark,' said Tom.

'Well, my dears, this must be the last till after tea. There was a beautiful peacock with the most lovely tail that ever was spread, and people came miles and miles to see it. The peacock was not content with its splendid tail, plenty of food, great care, and a sunny lawn, but it envied the lark because it could fly so high. The lark that could rise till it looked a speck in the sky, and there sing its glorious song, envied the peacock's tail. To punish the peacock it was given the wings of a lark, but when it tried to fly it fell over, and its gorgeous tail was crushed and spoilt, and the foolish bird was miserable all the days of its life. The lark for punishment had a peacock's tail, but then it could not fly, and could not spread the tail to show it; and was laughed at, and quite wretched till it died. So, my dears, be content with being what you are, and with what you have.'

The children were going to the garden.

'My dears, it is hot, even in the shade. Stop in this room, and play with your toys.'

'No, gran dear, we are tired of our toys,' said Tom.

'Well, Gummer, it's human nature to get tired of the toys we crave for. I dare say the boy who cried for the moon would have been tired of it before he had

had it a month. As poor pa said, we mostly care for what we have not, and what we have we don't care for till we lose it.'

'Let us decide about the book, Matilda. You think I ought to make it longer. What shall I write?'

'Now, Tom, how can I tell what you ought to write? You can only bring out what is in you. Moreover, Tom, not another word shall pass my lips. As poor pa said, he who fires without taking good aim will waste much powder and shot, but will, by luck, now and then bring down a bird; but a party who is such a careful aim-taker that he never fires, or at least not till the game is out of range, goes home with an empty bag. And further, Tom, I say, though my breath is short, that when people can't agree how something that should be done ought to be done, it's a saving of time and temper if one of the parties has her own way, or his own whim. Better to risk half spoiling your hare, Tom, than for cooks to squabble about the best way of stuffing it, until it is not worth cooking any way by reason of being days past eating by the likers of the highest game

THE END.

